C[redacted]OUNTESS OF ·ALBORNOZ·

TRANSLATED·FROM·THE SPANISH·OF·LUIS·COLOMA

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Coloma, Luis, 1851-1915.

Currita, countess of
Albornoz;

WITHDRAWN

Christmas.

1901

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CURRITA

Countess of Albornoz

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Countess of Albornoz

A Novel of Madrid Society

BY

LUIS COLOMA

TRANSLATED BY

ESTELLE HUYCK ATTWELL

Boston
Little, Brown, and Company
1900

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CURRITA

COUNTESS OF ALBORNOZ

PROLOGUE

TO THE READER

Friend Reader, — If you are a man of the world, not an easily frightened connoisseur of human miseries, but a lover of the truth although it be bitter, read without fear the pages of this book, for you will find nothing in them which is unknown to you, or which will vex you. But if you are a pious and timid soul, if the nakedness of the truth scandalizes you, or its rudeness wounds your self-love, stop now, and do not go on without first listening to what I am going to say to you.

For I much fear, should this be the case, and if my reasons do not convince you, that more than one surprise awaits you in the pages of this book. I let my pen wander through it with entire independence, rejecting with horror, upon outlining my picture, that perverse theory which broadens the standard of morality to the point of overflow of the passions, concealing in a manner more or less artful the perfidious idea of allowing all that is agreeable to pass as *licit ;* moreover I confess at the same time — if not with fright, at least with great vexation and even with a certain literary ire — that I also reject that other extreme common to some timorous consciences, who persist in seeing a danger in all that chances to delight them. For I judge the first to err through excess of boldness, in not seeing abysses where there may be flowers; and I am of the opinion that the

second err also through too much fear, in not being able to look upon a flower without imagining a precipice concealed behind it. Some starting from a false principle, and others from a holy truth, all pass from exaggeration to falsehood, and finally to insanity; the former imagining they can use as a guide to youth the crudities of Zola, and the latter believing that it does not do to teach children the Credo, and the articles of Faith, without introducing some prudent modifications, — of which I could quote some ridiculous examples. Strange phenomenon and singular exigency for the writer, that of these two opposite extremes! Legitimate children of the confusion of ideas in all classes of things that characterizes our epoch, and has for its origin, among a thousand other causes, the haughty self-sufficiency and contempt of the authority which legitimately defines, want of profundity and method in studies, the superficial, obtrusive, and interested teachings of the newspapers, and the funereal propensity of judging that which passes in our neighbor's heart by what is passing in our own!

It is quite certain that the author sins against morality, and deserves all censure, who praises the thief and approves and facilitates his thefts; or, protesting against them and recognizing their immorality, traces nevertheless, with good intentions but very little prudence, pictures of dangerous beauty and of seductive temptation, which exercise upon the incautious reader, and even upon him who does not consider himself so, the sinister attraction of the abyss. But you must not infer from this that the writer is equally immoral who confesses publicly that there are thieves; who gives the cry of alarm against them, and delivers them up to public shame, painting them with all those black tints which decorum tolerates, and which render vice repugnant and odious, thus making use of evil to do good, in the same way that Spring makes use of ordure to produce the rose.

And do not tell me that such an author always runs the fatal risk of opening the eyes of the innocent; for if he knows how to preserve that prudent decorum which I pointed

out before, and if the innocence of which you speak is the true innocence of the heart, pure and holy, ignorant of everything in theory, as well as in practice, it is evident that it will peruse these pages without understanding what is said between the lines, and will gather the rose without suspecting the existence of the thorn. And if by chance it should suspect and discover it, it is a clear and evident sign that those eyes were not so blind as you believed, and being no longer the pure innocence of the heart, but mere ignorance of the understanding, it will in the end profit by the lesson which the author encloses in prudent enigma. But if one converts the treacle into poison, his will be the fault, and not the physician's, and the malice will not abide in the writer, but in the self-will of the reader: as an old poet says, —

> "From the loveliest carnation,
> Pride of the delicious garden,
> The asp sucks poison;
> The busy bee, honey."

According to this standard, friend reader, I wrote the book that you have in your hands, and I honestly advise you, so that you may throw it aside in time if my way of reasoning does not satisfy you. And if by chance you marvel that, being who I am,[1] I enter with so much frankness on such dangerous ground, you must remember that, although I seem to be a novelist, I am only a missionary; and so, — like the friar of olden times who got up on the tables in the public plazas and preached therefrom rude truths to the wandering sheep who did not go to the temple, speaking to them in their own coarse language, that they might well understand, — so I also mount upon my roof-top in the pages of a novel, and preach thence to those who otherwise have no way of hearing me, and tell them plain and necessary truths in their own language, which could never be pronounced beneath the dome of a temple.

[1] The author is a Jesuit priest. — Tr.

For if you, pious and candid reader, seated on the banks of the streams of milk and honey which flow through the Celestial Jerusalem which you inhabit, if you believe that the notion of good and evil exists in all hearts with the same clearness which you possess in your understanding illuminated by grace, you are in gross error. In the world, and above all among a certain class of people, evil is blind to itself, on account of that same confusion of ideas, which reigns in all classes. When laxity is general in any society, the same thing happens which occurs on board ship : as everything moves equally, it seems as if nobody moved; it being necessary for some one to stop, that there may be a fixed point to mark the hurrying of the rest and the dangerous course of those who continue to move.

Never will a squint-eyed person understand his own defect, unless a faithful mirror be held before him, which will reflect his crooked sight; for the eye which serves to see and recognize others cannot see and recognize itself, unless a miracle should happen equivalent to that grace which you enjoy.

A great and charitable work, therefore, will be that of the book which serves as a fixed point to caution those on the ship who are drifting away from the shore; and which serves as a faithful mirror to the unfortunate squint-eyed person, who, beginning by recognizing in it his own misleading sight, will end by hating it in himself.

This explains, by the way, why I am detained at times with so many small details, which I would disdain as an artist, and to which I would not descend as a religious. The last refuge of the cross-eyed person who does not wish to look straight, is to deny that he understands the one who chides him for the defect in his sight; but when the critic puts before him intimate details known only to those of his class, he concedes upon the spot the immense advantage of experience, and surrenders at discretion, reflecting that if he who reprimands him was not also one of the many who squinted in his day, he must have been very near it: and

thus a great point is already gained in the heart that he wishes to win; for the idea that this inexorable critic studied in the same book, and conquered the same weaknesses, invites confidence and insures indulgence.

If you concede all these things and yet argue that it does not suit the dignity of "The Messenger" [1] to publish such profane stories, I beg you to consider one thing, of which no doubt you have not thought. Not all the subscribers of "The Messenger" are, like yourself, pious and spiritual; in its lists may be found very worldly women as well as mystical abbesses, and, side by side with the congregation of San Luis, indifferent men and even gay youths. It is necessary, then, that all this heterogeneous multitude should find food which will nourish and please it, for the holy doctrine of the monthly Intention, serious, profound, and devout, which the abbess relishes with delight, is too sublime food for the blunt palates of those who can swallow this same celestial doctrine only when it is submerged in a licitly profane sauce.

Let pious souls leave, then, this corner of "The Messenger" for those poor hungry ones who have to be fed by surprise with the holy doctrine of Christ; for far superior to the charity which consists in giving, is that which consists in understanding and supporting human weaknesses. It is that which makes me take my pen to write for them, although at the risk of hearing, as upon a certain occasion I have heard, that the sacerdotal character is lowered by writing such trivial things. As if charity could ever lower itself, no matter how much it stoops! With this, friend reader, I leave you in peace; you are free to peruse these pages of my book if it please you, or to leave them alone. I fear, nevertheless, and in your devout little eyes I see that you are already anxious to read it, and won't put it down until you have devoured it word for word; because if my reasons have not convinced you as I wish, curiosity will no doubt prompt

[1] First published in "The Spanish Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus." — Tr.

you to do that against which I plead. God be with you, then, and bless you. I, for my part, —

Con estas cosas que digo
Y las que paso en silencio,
A mis soledades voy
De mis soledades vengo.

With these things I say
And those I pass in silence,
From my solitude I come,
To my solitude I go.

PART I

CHAPTER I

Something is rotten in the State of Denmark.
SHAKESPEARE — *Hamlet.*

THE two little towers of the College rose sharp and graceful, like arrows piercing the blue sky, serene and radiant, which usually overspreads Madrid in the early days of June. The verdure of the garden made it resemble an emerald fallen in the sand, an oasis of little forests of lilacs, already withering, and of white lilies just opening, lost in the arid plains which stretched from the side of the College to the Court of Spain. The water leaped in the fountains and ran murmuring through the basins; one could hear happy voices of children in the interior of the edifice, and chirpings of the nightingales and linnets in the trees; but farther on, beyond the cross-barred gate, were neither children nor water, flowers nor birds, only a sterile plain, and town of huts; while yonder on the horizon, far, far away, lay Madrid, the Court of Spain, her cupolas and towers just appearing amid that haze which sets in relief the purity of the atmosphere, a species of vapor which rises from great cities like emanations from a fetid pool.

On this day school was closing; already the distribution of premiums had taken place, and the hour had come for the leave-takings. Congratulations and good-byes, messages and injunctions were heard on all sides, and fathers and mothers, children and servants, moving to and fro in a confused bustle, invaded all the rooms of the College, beaming with that pure satisfaction which the premium justly received, work finished, and the certain hope of rest inspire, — that tumultuous joy which the magic word *Vacations!* awakens in the student of whatever age.

The Commencement had been brilliant. In the lower part of the hall a platform richly decorated was occupied by the one hundred pupils of the College, in their uniforms of blue and silver, all fluttering with emotion, and searching with little, restless eyes, red cheeks, and beating hearts, among the multitude which filled the place, for father, mother, brothers, and sisters, who were to be the witnesses and participants of their triumph. The platform was crowned by a magnificent picture of *La Dolorosa, Our Lady of the Remembrance*, titulary of the College, and at its right the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, seated under a rich canopy and surrounded by the rector and professors of the College, presided over the exercises.

The rest of the immense hall was filled by the parents of the children, the grand lady, as well as the humble merchant's wife, the grandee of Spain, and the successful business man, all happy and satisfied, looking at each other and smiling, friends and strangers alike, as if the paternal sentiment, equally affected, abridged the distances and heightened the relations, awakening in every soul the same gladsomeness, the same happiness, and a mutual desire to look upon one another and embrace one another as brothers.

The orchestra opened the exercises, majestically playing the overture from *Semiramis*. The rector, an old religious, the honor and glory of the order to which he belonged, afterwards made a short address, which he could not finish. Fixing his dim eyes on this mountain of little blond and brunette heads, which gazed at him so attentively, crowded together and expressive as the little angels of a masterpiece of Murillo, he began to stammer, and tears cut short his speech.

"I do not weep because you are going," he was able to say at last; "but because many will never return."

The cloud of little heads began to shake negatively, and a spontaneous and noisy applause broke from those two hundred little hands, as an affectionate protest, which made the old man smile in the midst of his tears. The Secretary of the College then began to read the names of the prize pupils;

they all rose up, bashful, and perturbed with fright at the exhibition, and with the intoxication of their triumph. They went up to receive their medals and diplomas from the hands of the Archbishop amidst the applause of their companions, the sounds of music, and the bravos of the public, and returned hurriedly to their seats, seeking in the eyes of their fathers and mothers that look of infinite love and rightful pride which was for them the completion of the triumph. A tiny little fellow of eight years stole up the steps of the platform, stood up on tip-toe in order to discern his mother at a distance, saw her afar off, and threw her a kiss from the tip of his diploma. Young and old applauded with enthusiasm, some for that angelic instinct which makes the child understand what is holy and beautiful, others from that tender sympathy which awakens in the heart of every father and mother, when anything tends to reveal the pure love of the child.

The exercises seemed to be already finished, the Archbishop was about to give the blessing, and all rose to receive it on their knees, when a child fair and blond, beautiful and candid as one of Fra Angelico's angels, advanced towards the middle of the platform. In the enchantment of his youth and innocence was realized that indescribable something, aristocratic and delicately fine, which in children of grand houses attracts, subjugates, and even affects one. His long, light hair, cut in front like that of a little page of the fifteenth century, gave him the appearance of Prince Richard, painted by Millais in his celebrated picture, *The Sons of Edward.*

All stopped at the sight of him, each one remaining in his seat in the most profound silence. The child then turned his large blue eyes, beaming with candor and purity, towards the picture of the Virgin, and in a little angel's voice, began to recite :[1] —

[1] The verses of which this is a running translation were composed by Father Alarcon, and read on an occasion similar to that here described. — Tr.

"Sweet memory of my life,
Bless those who are departing.
O Virgin of Sorrowful Remembrance,
Receive my farewell greeting,
And remember thou me.

"Far from these guardian walls,
The companions of my happy age
Ne'er will be false to thy love;
They will keep their hearts pure,
They will remember thee."

A general applause broke from the group of children, like a cry of enthusiastic assent. The grown people did not applaud; but with their souls in their eyes, full of tears, they listened immovable. The child took two steps forward, and raising his little hands to his breast, continued slowly: —

"But I feel, upon leaving, an agony
Which the heart is unaccustomed to feel.
But who confides in the words of a child?
I fear — I know not what, mother mine,
For them and for me."

All were breathless; the tears falling made no sound. The child then turned his eyes to the public, with that vague look of innocence which always seems to investigate something unknown, and continued with a sadness which touched one, and with a simplicity which reached the soul: —

"They say the world is a beautiful garden,
But that the garden conceals asps —
That there are sweet fruits of deadly poison,
And that the sea of the world is full of rocks.
Why is it so?

"They say that, for gold and for honors,
Men without faith, of mean heart,
Dry up the spring of their love,
And to their God and their country are traitors.
Why are they so?

"They say that the thorns of this life
They wish to exchange for worldly feasts;
That they are the source of thy sorrows,
And that the mourning in thy sweet eyes
By them is caused."

Some women blushed, for from the lips of the child the voice of many consciences seemed to speak. Several men bowed their heads, and one voice, energetic but broken, repeated from a distance, "Yes! yes!" It was an old general, grandfather of a pupil of the College. The child seemed moved, as the angels might be at the sight of human miseries; he shook his little head sadly, crossed his hands, and continued, with the expression of a cherub looking down upon earth: —

"They, ingrates! fill thee with woe;
Shall I also be deaf to thy groan?
No! I like not fruits that poison.
I wish not for joys which pain thee, O mother,
I care not to be so.

"And while I respond to thy call,
While I judge myself blest in thy love,
And, burning with this affection which inflames me,
I tell thee often that I love thee,
Wilt thou forget me?

"Ah! no, sweet memory of my life.
Whene'er I may struggle in dangerous conflict,
Whene'er my sorrowful soul may weep
Upon remembering my farewell good-bye,
Wilt thou not remember me?

"And in return for love and sincere faith,
Ne'er without thy memory shall I live;
My last tear shall be for thee.
Until I die, mother, until I die,
I will remember thee.

"And thou, mother, when the time may come
To wing my flight to the Celestial Confines,
Drawing me to thee in a sweet embrace,
Ne'er separate me from thy side,
Ne'er let me go from thee."

The boy stopped. No applause was heard; only a sob broke forth, an immense sob, which from a thousand breasts seemed to issue from a single throat, carrying with it mingled feelings of love, tenderness, shame, enthusiasm, piety, and repentance, which the candid little voice of the child had awakened in these hearts. At a signal from the rector, all those who were on the platform rushed into the arms of their parents, and a veritable tempest of kisses, screams, embraces, blessings, tears of joy, and cries of delight broke forth. Only the child who had declaimed the verses remained solitary in his seat, without father or mother to receive him in their arms. The poor little creature gave a lingering glance at the happy groups, and with his premiums in his hands went slowly out through a wide corridor, in which the servants and the carriages of the children who were going were already gathering. At one end of it was a large globe, with the initials "F. L." on the top, and on this the child sat, as if waiting for something, with his premiums at his side, head bowed, and little cap in hand, sad, silent, and motionless. The joyful shouts of the multitude in the hall reached his ears, and little by little his chest began to heave, his throat swelled, and he burst out weeping, bitterly but silently, without sobs and without sighs, as those cry who have the source of their tears in the heart. The servants were already beginning to load up the equipages, and the groups of parents and children were moving towards the door with joyful commotion, but none observed the lonely boy. At times a companion passing gave him an affectionate tap, or a professor running hurriedly by smiled at him, and the child swallowing his tears smiled in return.

A stout lady of good-natured appearance found herself in this crush near the boy. She held by the hand a small, chubby child, who had obtained a premium for gymnastics. This little fellow noticed the tears of his companion, and pulling the skirts of the lady, whispered in her ear: —

"Mamma! mamma! Lujan is crying."

"What are you crying about, my child?" asked the lady,

compassionately. "You recited very well; did you not get a premium?"

The boy blushed, and raising his head with childish pride, answered, showing those he had: —

"Five, and two *excellences.*"

"You don't say so! Five premiums, and yet you are crying?"

The boy did not answer, but hung his head as if abashed, and began to cry afresh.

"But what is the matter, child?" insisted the lady. "Are you ill? Why are you crying?"

An immense distress, which in that little angel's face rent the soul, showed itself in the child's features. With his little teeth clenched, and his eyes overflowing with tears and bitterness, he replied at last: —

"Because I am all alone; my mamma did not come; no one has seen my premiums."

The lady seemed to understand all the profound bitterness which this simple lament contained. The tears sprang into her eyes, and while with one hand she stroked the blond head of the boy, she pressed with the other against her breast that of her son, as if she feared he too might some day be in want of that loving refuge.

"Bless his little heart!" she said at the same time. "My poor little boy! Your mamma has not been able to come; she is no doubt outside. What is her name?"

"The Countess of Albornoz," replied the boy.

A violent expression of indignation was depicted upon the countenance of the lady upon hearing this name. She turned abruptly towards a young lady who accompanied her, and exclaimed with more impetuosity than prudence: —

"Did you hear that? This certainly is an outrage to heaven! What a mother! While this angel is crying, she is scandalizing Madrid as usual."

"Psh! — Be careful!" replied the other, looking with anxiety at the child.

"But who can see such a thing with patience? What a

mother for such a son! I would have come from the ends of the earth to have seen my boy receive his premium for gymnastics. God bless you, my son! that shows that when you are big you will at least know how to pull a cart. All I want is that you will be good to me! Is it not so, Calisto, my love?"

And on the chubby cheeks of her child she imprinted those noisy and fond mother's-kisses which seem like little bites of the soul.

Lujan, wiping his large eyes, of a blue deep as the distant sea, had heeded nothing.

The lady turned to him, saying: —

"Come, my boy, don't cry. Go, Calisto, don't be stupid; say something to this little boy. Don't you see he is crying? What is your name, child?"

"Paquito Lujan," he replied.

"Well, don't cry any more, Paquito; your mamma is waiting for you at home. Look! Calisto, give him one of the boxes of sweets I brought you; or better, give him both and I will buy you more."

And as she saw that the boy refused the pretty little box of Mahonesa which Calisto handed him rather reluctantly, she added: —

"Take them, child; this is for you, and the other for your brothers and sisters. You have brothers and sisters, have you not?"

"I have Lili."

"Well, take one to Lili; and take this also;" and the good lady imprinted on his wet cheeks two sonorous kisses, in which she tried in vain to supply the warmth which he missed from the kisses of his mother.

A groom in a long, olive-green livery, with an earl's crest on the buttons, and carrying in his hand a high hat with a large, curly cockade, now approached the group.

"When the little master wishes, the carriage awaits him," he said respectfully to the boy. The poor little master sprang up with a bound, and embracing the gymnast Calisto

with a movement full of grace, he ran toward the door, without allowing the groom to carry his premiums. At the cross-barred gate the rector, who was there saying good-bye to the boys, detained him. Paquito kissed the old man's hand, who, embracing the boy affectionately, whispered a moment in his ear. The boy blushed deeply, his tears began to flow anew, and with affection he raised for the second time to his lips the hand of the priest.

Little by little the carriages went filing away, and at last the cries of good-bye ceased.

"Good-bye! good-bye!" repeated the old man.

Some little hands were still waving from a distance out of the carriage windows: —

"Good-bye! good-bye!"

Finally all were lost to view in the last angle of the road, and the arid plains, the dusty high-road, and the village alone remained. The College was left solitary and silent as an empty linnet's cage, and in the distance, hiding in ambush amid the haze, lay Madrid, the fetid pool. The poor old man let his arms fall dejectedly, bowed his head sadly, and entered the chapel murmuring: —

"Oh! Virgin of Sorrowful Remembrance, will they think of thee?"

CHAPTER II

That same afternoon, in the smoking-room of the Duchess of Bara, but few were present, and there was a great lack of animation. The Duchess lay extended almost at full length in a *chaise-longue*, smoking a deliciously pure cigar, whose reluctant rings betrayed its genuineness. She complained of headache. Spread over her lap, but not fastened, was a little apron of very fine pelt, and of elegant cut, designed to preserve from the risk of conflagration the laces of her *matinée* of raw silk; and from time to time she shook off the ashes into a pretty, round earthenware jar, which

represented a group of cupids rising out of egg shells in the bottom of a nest. Pilar Balsano was puffing another cigar, not so strong, but quite as large as that of the Duchess, and was making rings, while Carmen Tagle was almost dislocating her jaws trying to smoke another, which showed itself somewhat rebellious.

"It is evident this is n't going to draw," she soon said. And in order to gain more strength, she sipped, slowly and with a most distinguished air, a third glass of very strong whiskey, which was served in a rich flask of Bohemian glass, with tea, brioches, and sandwiches.

The wife of Lopez Moreno, stout and majestic, like the money-bags of her husband, contracted her large lips in order to draw a little paper cigarette, and laughed maternally to see her daughter Lucy, who had just left school, take little puffs from Angelito Castropardo's cigar. The young girl puffed, coughed, and made faces; Angelito puffed to give her a masterly example, and the little school-girl began again to puff and cough, finding the pastime most diverting. It seemed to please her very much to have a grandee of Spain for a teacher, and she tried to study the *chic* of these illustrious ladies, whom her mother had held up to her as models of distinction. Yet, nevertheless, her school-girl eyes saw in them very curious things. The Duchess was disgusted with the loud laughter of the banker's wife, but the mortgages which the latter's spouse had upon the property of the former amounted to over two millions, and, considering the necessity of a prospective furlough, it was advisable to prepare the way with patience and amiability.

Leopoldina Pastor, a lively maiden lady, already past forty, clever and very learned, despatched a good ration of *brioche milanaise*, while arguing with Don Casimiro Pantojas, a former director of public instruction, an academician, and a most celebrated literary man. That week the tramway (or *el tranvia*) had been inaugurated in the suburb of Salamanca, and the academician was lamenting the fact that the

common populace had begun by making the new vehicle masculine, contrary to the opinion of one of his colleagues, who held it to be feminine.

Señorita Pastor, an ardent defender of the grammatical statute laws, promised him that she would propagate *la* tranvia on all sides; but good Don Casimiro happened to let escape him that the academician in question was Don Salustiano Olozaga, upon which Leopoldina changed her opinion, exclaiming with vexation: —

"Impossible that it be feminine! Olozaga is an indecorous Amadist, who bestowed upon Thiers the *Toison d'or*, and that no Alfonsist will pardon. So, no more discussion! —'*el* tranvia' they say, and '*el* tranvia' they shall continue to say!"

And all agreed to put trousers on the tramway, including Fernando Gallarta and Gorito Sardona, young bloods of the Veloz Club, and the important Marquis of Butron, Minister Plenipotentiary before the time of "*La Gloriosa*" (Queen Isabella), and ever since only a distinguished gastronomist. The Marquis had an extremely hairy face, and Queen Isabella used to call him Robinson Crusoe, for, as she said, only with the face of her Minister Plenipotentiary before her, could she picture to herself the famous shipwrecked man, clothed in skins, in his desert island. And to tell the truth, those destinies of the entire sphere, which Napoleon enclosed in the vertical wrinkle of his forehead, could remain as perfectly concealed between the eye-brows of the Marquis as between two rabbit's-ears.

Butron knit the formidable wrinkle, and looking at the ashes of his cigar, said solemnly: —

"Olozaga! — he, and he only, serves as a prop to this situation, which is going to pieces. Without his dexterity and his efforts, we should have had the Restoration founded half a year ago."

The ladies were very indignant, and the Marquis, who was really in league with the intrigues of reactionary politicians, continued his harangue. Carmen Tagle turned her attention

to what was going on behind her, back of an easel of red velvet partially draped gracefully with a piece of silk of the sixteenth century, upon which was painted a beautiful water-color by Worms.

Between the red legs of the easel, the skirts of a lady and the legs of a gentleman appeared. These *incognitos* were Maria Valdivieso and Paco Velez, who had been keeping up a tremendous dispute for the last half-hour. The little school-girl Lucy also strained her ears to try if she could catch anything, and in fact she caught two or three times the name of Izabel Mazacan, and that of a certain minister of the day, very young and very clever, named Garcia Gomez. Presently she caught something else; from the lady had escaped a furious "Canaille!" and from the gentleman a tremendous oath, which made Lucy give a start, blushing furiously; and Carmen Tagle exclaimed between her teeth, with her proverbial pertness: —

"*Oh, mon Dieu! quel gros mot!*"

Then, raising her voice a little, she said, turning towards the easel: —

"Maria, are you not coming? The tea is getting cold."

The Marchioness of Valdivieso then appeared, through the labyrinth of gew-gaws and ornaments which filled the room, and sat down by Carmen Tagle, very much ruffled, her eyes blazing lightning-flashes of wrath. Paco Velez went out by the other side of the hiding-place, his hands in his pockets, his ears red, and biting his lips. He stopped to examine with an air of intelligence a very beautiful lamp of inlaid copper, which upon a Solomonic column formed a *pendant* for the easel. Lucy, who did not know the Marchioness, asked in a very low voice of her instructor Castropardo if that gentleman was her husband.

"Her husband! Heavens!" and a loud laugh burst from Angelito Castropardo. "Where in the world did the child get the queer idea into her head that they were married?"

"Because they were quarrelling!" said Lucy, much embarrassed.

Castropardo suffered another outburst of hilarity to escape him, and, scarcely able to say for laughing, "The question has a foundation," went over to whisper in the Duchess's ear the little collegiate's idea.

This incident passed unnoticed by all the rest, distracted as they were with the black picture of the present situation, which the hairy diplomat was deliberately painting to them. He knew very well that the ladies of the nobility were the right arm of the politics of the Restoration, and his was the task to inflame and direct the zeal of such illustrious conspirators. They, with their ostentatious patriotism and their aristocratic outcries, had succeeded in isolating Don Amadeo of Savoy and Queen Maria Victoria, penning them up in the palace of the Plaza de Oriente, in the midst of a Court of "palace key-keepers and rich shop-keepers," according to the opinion of the Duchess of Bara, and of "good-for-nothings," according to Leopoldina Pastor. The ladies assembled at the Fuente Castellano, reclining in their grand carriages, with classical mantillas of silk lace and little shell combs, while the *fleur-de-lis*, emblem of the Restoration, sparkled in all the toilets which they wore at the theatres and balls. Even there, and at that moment, the wife of Lopez Moreno had on a colossal one set with diamonds; and with better taste for the dress and hour, the other ladies also wore them made of enamelled gold. Leopoldina Pastor had one made of cloth, the size of a carrot, on the very top of her hat.

Frightful was the picture the Marquis drew. Isolated, the poor King looked ceaselessly towards the frontier, hoping for the answer to his address of April 3, which as yet — and it was now the twenty-first of June — had received no response. The ministerial crises were continuing with frequency and periodically, like the chills and fevers of a tertian ague, until a ministry was formed called Santa Rita, that saint being the advocate for impossible cases. In the provinces, the troops and peasants had risen up in rebellion; the shop-keepers had revolted in Madrid and

stoned the *alcalde;* and five days before, June 18, a vile populace ran through the streets, stoning windows and breaking the illuminated lamps of the fête with which many were celebrating the aniversary of Pius IX. All this time an immense multitude of all colors applauded, in the gardens of the Retiro, "*El Principe Lila*" (The Lilac Prince), a grotesque satire in which they dubbed the reigning monarch with the name of Macarroni I. Several members of the Veloz Club, of whom Paco Velez was one, had paid three Savoyards to hide in a proscenium box of the theatre where Don Amadeo was present, and suddenly to interrupt the performance by singing, to the sound of their harps and violins, the well known ballad: —

"Cicirinella tenia un gallo,
E tutta la noche montaba á caballo
Montaba la notte bella,
Viva! il gallo de Cicirinella!"

This amused the ladies very much, for it was evident that it would remove the difficulties from the path of the Restoration, for which they anxiously worked. But the thing to be feared, the dark cloud, — and here the Marquis accentuated the frightful tints of his countenance, arching his eyebrows, — was that the Carlists were beginning to move again in the North, and the Republicans were moving on all sides, making it very difficult to defend from such a wide-open mouth the lonely and much longed-for morsel.

"The Restoration is a sure thing," concluded Butron, with a prophetic accent; "but we shall obtain it only by traversing a pool of blood. I foresee for Spain a ninety-three with all its horrors!"

The ladies were overwhelmed, and in voices low and suppressed, as if they had, like Marie Antoinette, through the windows of the Temple, seen the head of "La Lamballe" stuck on a pike, began to talk of the guillotine. To die terrified them. How did they know what it was to die? They understood it only in the Royal theatre, letting them-

selves sink little by little into Violeta Valery's arm-chair, and into the arms of Alfred, singing in time with the orchestra "*Addio d' il passato.*"

The Duchess said, with failing voice, that she had seen in London, in Mme. Tussaud's gallery, the identical guillotine upon which Louis XVI. died. Lopez Moreno's wife raised her hand to her fat neck, as if she already felt upon it the edge of the fatal knife. Leopoldina Pastor was not frightened; if she had to die, she would die like Charlotte Corday, after having first despatched half a dozen "good-for-nothings" like Marat. Carmen Tagle sighed, stuck her tongue out a little, and asked if it would hurt much.

"You would only feel a slight coolness," answered a hollow voice in the distance.

All turned affrighted, expecting to encounter Robespierre's ghost, come to give them his opinion from experience. They saw only Don Casimiro Pantojas, smilingly squeezing with one hand the windpipe, and breaking with the other the tail, of a little Dresden china rabbit, which among a hundred costly trifles adorned a table. Always absent-minded, the good gentleman broke continually whatever came within reach of his asparagus-like fingers, and to these raids without number on furniture and bric-à-brac he owed the nickname of "The literary Cyclone."

Everybody laughed, and the sally of the academician, which was only a repetition of what Guillotin said in his report to the French Assembly regarding his terrible invention, helped to brighten up somewhat the sombre atmosphere. A living wind-storm, or feminine hurricane, who now appeared in the doorway, succeeded in dissipating it entirely. Izabel Mazacan came in with her Diana-like step, head in the air, and haughty expression, too genteel for a *cocotte*, and too impertinent for a grande-dame. She kissed the Duchess, pulled off one glove, and took two sips of tea.

"Butron, a cigar," she said, and with the aplomb of a veteran, suddenly, and without preamble exploded this bomb: —

"The first lady-in-waiting of the palace has been appointed."

Ladies and gentlemen started in their seats with surprise, and the headache of the Duchess disappeared as if by enchantment.

"Who is it?"

"But who can it be?"

Who could it be, in fact? — for the great point of the Alfonsist ladies had been to slight Queen Maria Victoria, leaving vacant the post of first lady-in-waiting, which exacts as an indispensable requisite the nobility of Spain, and is in itself a position so high and delicate that it does not receive, but lends authority to the Queen herself.

"Bah!" finally exclaimed the Duchess; "some Colonel's wife from Alcolea."

"Some distinguished burgher's wife," said Carmen Tagle.

"Miss Zaeo, equestrian artist," opined Gorito Sardona.

And Paco Velez barefacedly, without being repulsed, without an expression of surprise from any woman, and without receiving a slap in the face from any man, added: —

"The tall Paca — *artiste anonyme*."

Angelito Castropardo, standing behind Lopez Moreno's stout wife, pointed to her with a mischievous gesture and winked his eye, as if to ask if she was the one; and the Countess of Mazacan, with much deliberation, and without the banker's wife being able to understand by the expression of her face what she was saying, or to whom she was speaking, answered him, emphasizing the words: —

"Elle n'est pas grosse d'Espagne; elle est grande d'Espagne."

The surprise increased, with signs of indignation, and even the circumspect diplomat contracted his brows, exclaiming:

"Impossible! impossible!"

"It must be some provincial grandee, — some good-for-nothing whom we do not know," said Leopoldina Pastor.

"Not at all; she is a grandee of the Court, and of the old stock, and I am surprised not to find her here."

"Here?" — shrieked the Duchess, menacingly.

And eyes were turned in all directions, as if seeking under tables, or on the top of some *étagère*, for the new lady-in-waiting.

"But who is it? Who is it?" they all screamed.

Izabel Mazacan let a malicious little smile escape her, as one who tastes an anticipated triumph, handed a glass to Paco Velez for him to fill with whiskey, emptied it with one swallow, and finished at last by discharging the bomb.

"Curra Albornoz," she said.

The declaration was so stupendous that its effect was destroyed. A cry of general incredulity broke from all lips, and the Duchess sank back again in the depths of her *chaise-longue*, exclaiming: —

"This is absurd!"

"Utterly ridiculous!" added Gorito, very indignantly.

It was Izabel Mazacan's turn to become furious, and while old Butron tried to disguise a sudden dread, as if he judged such an appointment to be a matter of serious danger, she said, very much vexed at the fiasco of her news: —

"But I am really amazed at your surprise! What is the meaning of all this astonishment? Is it possible that at any time Curra has ever been ashamed of herself?"

"That is quite another thing!" replied the Duchess, with refreshing coolness. "But the enormity which you attribute to her would be worse than a fault, it would be a folly. Lady-in-waiting to *La Cisterna!* How absurd!"

"But I have it on good authority!"

"Go on, don't be afraid to tell; none of us have occasion to blush," exclaimed Maria Valdivieso, with extreme pointedness. "Did not Garcia Gomez tell you?"

The Countess of Mazacan hesitated a moment, and then, not even blushing for the much-commented-upon relations which she had with the handsome minister, said at last: —

"Yes, Garcia Gomez told me."

"Well, although Saint Garcia Gomez says so, I don't believe it!" replied the Duchess, dauntlessly. "I should have to see her in the Cisterna's carriage in order to believe."

"You will soon believe, so don't worry," interrupted Izabel Mazacan, with much sarcasm. "Don't you remember that Currita was in Paris when the abdication of the Queen took place? And don't you remember also that it did not occur to any one to invite her to the ceremony? She took very good care not to say so; but her husband, Villamelon, who has more of melon about him than villa, let it escape him one night in Camponegro's house. This is the whole thing in a nutshell! She has never pardoned the slight, and now wishes to be revenged; so prepare for the worst, Beatrice! They did not even offer her the post; she herself solicited it!"

Everybody was startled, and the Countess of Mazacan continued: —

"It is true the post pays her well, for she gets a salary of six thousand dollars and —"

"Six thousand dollars salary! — what nonsense! Why, none of the palace salaries exceed three thousand."

"Well, Currita gets more than six thousand, for she has also solicited —"

Here Garcia Gomez's friend gave a fiendish little smile, and added very slowly: —

"— the private secretaryship to Don Amadeo, for Juanito Velarde, who is now her intimate friend."

"Velarde?" exclaimed Pilar Balsano, very much surprised. "I had no idea of such a thing!"

"And you have heard it now for the first time? For Heaven's sake Pilar, you are always wool-gathering —"

"I have often seen him with Villamelon, but I never suspected anything."

"And what better sign do you want? Even the affections of that model couple are the same. Currita's intimate confidant is the friend whom Villamelon most affects. It is by that I know whose turn it is."

Everybody laughed, as they always did when the Countess of Mazacan began to gossip, and Lopez Moreno's wife said very contentedly: —

"What a girl Izabel is! How gracefully she crucifies everybody!"

The Countess did not particularly relish the familiar "Izabel," and as the banker's wife had no mortgages upon her lands, she answered her, laying particular stress upon her Christian name.

"As far as that is concerned, Señora doña *Ramona*, I am assured that I never calumniate anybody."

The Duchess, who as yet had not surrendered her opinion, wished to reply something; but the Marquis, restless and nervous, imposed silence, extending a hand which, like Jacob's, seemed to be covered with goatskin mittens.

"Enough, enough, ladies," he said; "you are playing with fire!"

And casting a scrutinizing glance around, which shone between his eyebrows like the sun between clouds, he added:

"We all here have the same interests, and can speak openly. If what Izabel says is so, complications will surely follow such an appointment. It is quite true about the abdication, but it was an oversight. I was there at the time, and Pepe Cerneta told me about it. The Queen herself also told me, lamenting the occurrence. For that reason, when I noticed that Currita had resented it, I myself wrote to the Queen, advising her to give her some satisfaction."

"Well, you did very wrong! — a waste of precious time!" interrupted Izabel Mazacan, with an exceedingly graceful *moue*.

"No! Izabel, you are mistaken! for when a party is in trouble, its policy is always to conciliate the foe. And so the Queen answered me shortly, saying she would invite her to the first communion of our Prince in Rome. But just imagine what a compromise it will be for me, if she does it now! *Mon Dieu*, what a blunder! But Izabel, harebrained, why did you not tell me all this in secret?"

"And why should I? For you to keep it to yourself, I suppose."

"Most certainly! — for that very reason! It is most

important for us to keep all this to ourselves, and it is necessary that I should speak as soon as possible with Currita."

"She will be here in a minute or two."

"Here?"

"Yes, here! I have an appointment to meet her to visit the children of the foundling hospital. She is one of the committee of ladies."

"Ah! yes," exclaimed Carmen Tagle, in a very devout tone. "Currita has a truly tender affection for those poor little ones."

"Maternal," said Gorito, in the same tone.

"Truly maternal," repeated several others, very conscientiously; and all burst into a laugh, including the little collegiate, while Butron, very much excited, repeated, with the attitude of Neptune calming the seas: —

"Be sensible, ladies; be sensible, for Heaven's sake! Let no one say a single word, or appear to be cognizant of anything until I speak to her."

"Ah! no indeed," exclaimed the Countess of Mazacan, very disconsolately; "I would not renounce for anything in the world the pleasure of making her rave a little."

"But all this cannot be true; everything can be arranged."

"All right; while you arrange it, we will enjoy ourselves."

Butron wished to invoke his authority, but it was too late. Through the door of the smoking-room they all saw, approaching from the adjoining salon, a very petite and slender lady, who walked with mincing steps upon her high heels, giving little taps on the floor with the end of the long handle of her lace parasol. She had red hair and a face full of freckles, while the pupils of her gray eyes were so light that they seemed to be limited to a certain distance, producing a strange effect, like the dead eyes of a statue.

Upon seeing her, Leopoldina Pastor ran to the grand Erad piano, which was in an angle of the room, tore off with a single pull the rich antique brocaded cover, and began to

play furiously Doña Maria Victoria's new hymn, one of the philharmonic intemperances in which the progressive party were so fruitful. Gorito Sardona jumped in front of the door, upon a puff of Japanese sheepskin, and catching up, in pretence of a hat, one of the antique chiselled silver waiters, bowed before the lady, slowly and inflexibly, without moving his head, extending his arm so as to form a right angle with his body, which was Don Amadeo's customary salute.

Currita paused a moment in the doorway, without losing her timid air of schoolgirlish ingenuousness. She heard the hymn, saw Gorito, and took in the situation with a single and rapid glance. Suddenly she bowed with exquisite distinction, in order to respond to the Amadist salute with another Court salute, profound, deliberate, to the right, to the left, and to the front, making a very elegant caricature of the reverential ceremony common to Queen Doña Maria Victoria.

CHAPTER III

On the twenty-first of June, 1832, Ferdinand VII., limping more from gout than age, and Maria Christina, in the height of her beauty and elegance, stood sponsors for a child named Fernando Christian Robustiano Cárlos Luis Gonzaga Alfonso de la Santisima Trinidad Anacleto Vicente, in the little parochial college church of the Holy Trinity, at the royal country-seat of San Ildefonso.

He was the first-born son of the Marquis and Marchioness of Villamelon, grandees of Spain; the former being chamberlain to his Majesty the King, and the latter maid of honor to her Majesty the Queen. It was the last child for whom Ferdinand stood godfather in this valley of tears; fifteen months afterwards he descended into the tomb in the royal palace of Madrid, fulfilling to the letter the simile of the bottle of beer to which the sly monarch compared his

people. He was the cork that popped out; the revolution was the foamy liquid which diffused itself on all sides.

That same afternoon Ferdinand wished to examine his godson closely; and in his own room, hidden in the depths of his arm-chair, he took the newly born upon his knees, opened its little mouth with one finger, and put his nose of pure Bourbon lineage inside, as if he wished to examine the narrow opening of the throat. The case was marvellous, and Ferdinand, frightened upon ascertaining the fact, withdrew his nose promptly. The young Villamelon had come into the world with all his teeth complete.

Henri IV. was born with two front teeth, Mirabeau with two jaw-teeth, and whoever surpassed to such an extent the great King and the famous tribune, evidently of him also great things should be expected. Villamelon senior wept with joy, and the Count of Alcudia, who happened to be there at the time, advised him to employ for the lactation of his son the twenty-seven cows and forty goats which served as suckling nurses to the infant hippopotamus, gift of Abbas-Pacha, which was being brought up in Paris in the Jardin des Plantes. But Ferdinand VII. argued that they should give him chops to suck, and wean him afterwards with alcohol; and that same night he sent to his godson as a christening present a large carving-knife of massive gold, which had the arms of Spain engraved on the handle.

The Queen also desired to examine the prodigy, putting the tip of her rosy finger in the little Villamelon's mouth; and Don Tadeo Calomarde, who came in at that moment, wishing to make the same experiment, introduced his finger stained with ink. Whereupon the child pressed with all his might upon it his precocious set of teeth, causing the minister to give a slight scream.

"One can see he is no fool," said Ferdinand VII.

All laughed at the monarch's repartee, and the saying spread from the royal chamber to the parlors, through the ante-salas, and down the staircases, everybody, very much astonished, commenting upon the infant's talent, and assert-

ing that when only three days old he had recited to his august godfather the Our Father, Hail Mary, part of the litany of Loretto, and a little fable by Don Tomas Iriarte, — the one which begins: —

"Through a copse,
Followed by dogs —
I don't say ran,
But *flew*, a rabbit."

The event was extraordinary, and thence originated his reputation as man of talent which the future Marquis of Villamelon was to enjoy, until his repeated absurdities should destroy it.

At the age of twenty, having by the death of his father come into possession of his title, he entered the Academy of Artillery, and in the year '59 proceeded to the African war, on board a squadron commanded by General Don Segundo Herrera. Anxious to set foot on African soil, and to stain his virgin sword with Agaric blood, Villamelon landed at a place called Black Cape, with sufficient courage to travel through all the land of the Moors and arrive at Tunis, where his grandfather had won greatness by entering the Alcazaba with John of Austria.

But suddenly, from among the dense reeds which covered the reddish shore, like the bristly hair of a wild beast, several disbanded natives burst forth, and fired upon the explorers. Villamelon did not hesitate an instant; he forgot the land of the Moors, gave up Tunis, disowned the grandfather who had gained greatness in the Alcazaba, and made with all haste for the sloop Blanca, where he hid himself in the farthest corner of his stateroom, and did not show himself again on deck until they were on their return journey to the Peninsula, pleading sickness as his excuse. The natives had seemed very ugly to him in that short interview, and so badly educated that it was impossible for any decent person to have anything to do with them.

He afterwards asked to be retired, and entered Madrid

triumphantly, like Napoleon on his return to Paris from the Egyptian campaign, preceded by the fame of his exploits in the terra-naval combat of Black Cape. The story of the terra-naval combat circulated through all the Court, very much exaggerated by the hero himself; and one day when he was acting guard of the palace, as grandee of Spain, and was mentioning for the hundredth time during dinner the terra-naval combat of Black Cape, the Queen said to him suddenly: —

"Look, Villamelon; why not vary it occasionally? Don't say always 'terra-naval;' if only for to-day, let it be *navo-terrestre.*"

And Villamelon for the rest of his life was dubbed *navo-terrestre*, baptized by royal lips.

The Marquis was at that time, without being a spendthrift, very much of a libertine, but not with that aristocratic libertinage of the Lauzuns and the Frousacs, genteel even in their vices, gentlemanly even in their infamy, who shook off from themselves all that was vulgar and gross, with the same elegant grace with which they would shake off from their lace frills the ashes of their perfumed tobacco. His libertinage was, on the contrary, that other libertinage so common in Spain among the young men of high families, a strange mixture and hybrid type of the common fellow and the sportsman, of the gypsy and the muscadin, which one would say was born of the antithetical marriage of an Andalusian bull with a Parisian soubrette. Tired at last of bar-maids and ballet-girls, of bulls and of handicaps, of *manzanilla* and champagne, of tripe and of *foie-gras* he resolved to end it all, that is, — to get married!

But in order for Villamelon to make an end, it was necessary that some daughter of Eve should make a beginning; that is to say, by one of those anomalies which have their reason for existence in the crooked standard of certain social classes, it is agreed that the same marriage in which the man thinks of ending, the woman decides to begin.

The work of selection, *l'embarras du choix*, as he him-

self said, was not very difficult for Villamelon, for he was not fastidious in any of his ideas. He believed in God as an excellent person, with whom he discharged his duty to excess by leaving for him from time to time a card in the chancel of the church. Man was for him a very well arranged digestive tube; life a pilgrimage, which, with the purse well replete and the stomach well filled, could be made conveniently; and marriage the fusion of two incomes, and the prolongation of a race which would bear his illustrious name, in the same manner that the bulls of Veraguas, or the mares of Mecklenburg would bear theirs.

One saw Villamelon, then, the hero of the *navo-terrestre* combat of Black Cape, who had been so much terrified at the relative nudity of the natives, ask without repugnance and obtain without fright the hand of an illustrious savage, completely bare of soul. For just as in forests and deserts one meets with savages, who offend decency by the nakedness of their bodies, so also one finds in plazas and drawing-rooms other savages, dressed exteriorly, who insult modesty by the interior nakedness of their souls. For them it is useless, no matter how many adornments more or less artificial humanity makes use of, to hide their vices. The virtuous blush no less than false hypocrisy, noble decorum as well as deceitful preoccupation, provoke from them the same loud laugh of incredulous wonder as that which burst from Cetewayo the dethroned King of the Zulus, at the sight of the shirt which his English conquerors offered him.

This illustrious civilized savage was her Excellency Señora Doña Francisca de Borja Soliz y Gorbea, Countess of Albornoz, Marchioness of Catañalzar, twice grandee of Spain in her own right, and Marchioness of Villamelon and of Paracuellar, with the added greatness of her illustrious husband, as hero of the *navo-terrestre* battle of Black Cape. But by one of those exceptions which remove in some sort the individual from the general rules of the type, in order to create in it a special character, the Countess had a mod-

esty all her own, — a strange modesty, which could very well be called the modesty of her husband. For this couple, far from being, like so many others of their class, the pair of dogs which try to walk as far apart as the very elastic chain that unites them permits, were, on the contrary, seen always together everywhere, he teasing her with affectionate attentions, and she returning them with the *moues* of a timid child, or an innocent school-girl, whose enchanting *enfantillage* added to her shameless cynicism produced in one's imagination the strange effect of a Carib drinking from a very dainty little cup of Bohemian glass, little by little, and sip by sip, foaming warm blood, or of a cannibal, who, with knife and fork of brightest silver, would cut with the greatest possible grace a steak of human flesh. Villamelon, nevertheless, had realized his dream; for his wife prolonged his race by adding to it a boy and a girl, and his income, which, as he expressed it, furnished the dinner, united to hers furnished in its turn the supper. He supped and dined with all the sumptuous rules of the art; for Villamelon always honored his precocious set of teeth and the carving-knife of massive gold, gift of his august godfather, being a glutton as well as a gastronomist, a *gourmand* as well as a *gourmet*, a tunnel without end as to the quantity he ate and drank, and an intelligent Brillat-Savarin as to the quality and style of that which he devoured, always deaf to the clamors of indigestion, which from time to time took upon itself to preach morals to his stomach. The wife for her part was also happy; immersed in her shame, like the Greek heroes of Stygia, she had made herself invulnerable, and with her infinite audacity, and her cynical feminine knavery, obtained the only end of her life and the natural desire of her immense vanity, which was to exalt herself above everybody else, to be always the first, and to manage that all tongues should pay her homage, being constantly occupied, either for good or for evil, which, mattered very little, with her own person and her own affairs. One could say of her what an elegant writer once said of a certain person: "If she assists at a

wedding she would like to be the bride; if at a christening, the newly born; and if at a funeral, the corpse." And although nobody could have explained the reason why Currita enjoyed this supremacy at Court, nevertheless, with that shameful condescension to the scandalous which is in our opinion the capital sin of high Madrid society, and the origin and fount of its deformities, everybody, from the polished gentleman to the elegant gambler, from the honored lady to the woman without decorum, subjected themselves to her in a manner more or less direct, without ceasing on that account to proclaim that in beauty she was excelled by all, in family she was equalled by many, in riches surpassed, but that in audacity and assurance she marched always first. Could this, then, be the reason of that supremacy? Can it be that from the habit of seeing vice refined and from breathing the atmosphere of scandal, certain societies reach the aberration of those barbarous peoples who pay their most profound homage and their most enthusiastic worship to the most monstrous idol? Let us limit ourselves to mentioning the fact, without attempting to analyze it, and let us see what Currita did that afternoon at the Duchess of Bara's house.

The latter had half risen in her seat when Currita approached her, bowing to right and left, to the sound of the hymn of Doña Maria Victoria, repeating with her customary frank little laugh: —

"Thanks! thanks, beloved people!"

"*A tout seigneur, tout honneur!*" the Duchess said to her, returning her kisses.

All grouped themselves around Currita, who had seated herself next to the Duchess, declining a cup of tea which was offered her, and requesting instead a small glass of whiskey, for it was *de rigueur* at that time among some elegant women, who pretended to form the heart of *la crême*, to smoke and drink to their heart's content, with much distinction and grace. The worthy Butron offered her a cigar.

"Ah! no, no," she said in a melodious little voice, "this is like a straw; you, Gorito, give me a stronger one."

And while Gorito gave her one capable of making a cavalry sergeant fall over backwards, and while she lighted it daintily with a prosaic match, the Duchess said to her: —

"But go ahead, my dear; tell us all about it!"

"And what have I to tell?" she asked between two puffs, "since I see you know all."

"But is it true?" asked Butron, confounded.

"Most true!" replied Currita, with emphasis.

Butron raised both hands to heaven, the Countess of Mazacan swept with a triumphant glance the horrified company, and the Duchess, furious, exclaimed violently: —

"And you have the assurance to say so? and the courage to come and tell it here in my house?"

Currita seemed to be very much surprised, in fact almost frightened, and sweeping the whole assembly with her pale, admirably perplexed eyes, said in the little pitiful tone of a child who is threatened with a whipping: —

"But let us understand each other. What is it you have heard?"

"That you have been appointed first lady-in-waiting to the *Cisterna*," said Izabel Mazacan, with all her arrogance.

Currita pretended to faint.

"I!" she said, with the rosy indignation of a virgin whose virtue is doubted. "And you all believed it?"

"No one! No one!" exclaimed Butron, giving an immense gasp like a giant who has had a mountain lifted from his breast. "Not for a moment has any one doubted your loyalty, my dear child; and rest assured that — "

"*Mon Dieu!* Sir, what people! and what tongues! what a way of distorting the simplest things!" said Currita, with failing voice.

And wiping away with her very fine handkerchief a tear which, real or false, appeared in her eyes, she showed with affected carelessness the exquisite *fleur-de-lis* which she wore on her breast, and a magnificent gold bracelet, on which, in

large incrusted diamonds, one could decipher the monogram of Isabella II.

"The case could not be simpler," she continued with that soft little voice which never changed its same deliberate tone. "Yesterday, in the Council, they discussed the appointment of lady-in-waiting, — for really the position of that poor *Cisterna*[1] could not be more difficult, — when, if you please, the Minister of Ultramar took it into his head to propose that they should make me the offer."

"The good-for-nothing!" screamed Leopoldina Pastor; "and your husband has not stabbed him yet?"

"To be sure, he deserves it; but after all it is poor Ferdinand's fault," continued Currita, with the air of a long-suffering spouse. "He interested himself in obtaining the private secretaryship to Don Amadeo for his friend Juanito Velarde, and spoke to the minister about it. The latter helped him, and, being emboldened by that, has presumed too far, just as I told Fernandito; if one gives these people an inch they take an ell. In fact, my dear, the President of the Council came in person to make me the proposal. Of course I did not receive him; Fernandito met him, and there was a scene. I was half dead with fright, for I thought they were going to come to blows in the street, and settle the question with shots; but, at last the minister went back whence he came, with his ears burning, and God knows what they will say of me now to be revenged. This is all that happened; so I thought on coming in, when I heard the hymn, and saw Gorito's salute, that you were poking fun at me."

[1] We notify the reader from now on, that neither in this nor in any of the personages who present themselves in the many historical episodes of this novel, discharging official duties, has it been the wish to photograph or even allude to those who really may have occupied those posts in the epoch to which we refer. For, although many personalities are far from being sympathetic to us, they inspire us at least with compassion; and when castigating vice and scandal without mercy, we take good care not to become irritated against any special person, whom repentance may already have placed beyond all censure. With more reason than Crevillon we can say: "*Jamais aucun fiel a empoisonné ma plume.*"

Butron made a profound signal of assent, and the Duchess, already completely pacified, and wishing to make amends for her previous fit of passion, said vivaciously: —

"But how could you think anything else?" and seizing the wrist on which Currita wore the bracelet of Isabella II., she kissed her hand with great tenderness, saying: —

"If you were lady-in-waiting to the *Cisterna*, you would deserve to have this bracelet become a fetter."

"Have you not seen it on me before?" said Currita, very naïvely. "The Queen gave it to me on my last birthday."

While the Countess of Albornoz was speaking, Izabel Mazacan, very much excited, was whispering to Butron, saying to him: —

"But what a grand impostor! and what a way to invent stories; it is a lie, Butron, all a lie! for Garcia Gomez told me that it was in the Court itself that the minister of Ultramar gave notice of her desire, and that the appointment was then accorded, the approbation of the *Cisterna* being taken for granted. To-day, this very morning, the President of the Council must have gone to notify Currita of it."

No sooner had Currita ceased speaking than the Countess of Mazacan hastened to say aloud, with a marked air of triumph: —

"You see? Did I not tell you all how it was? The same, the very same thing that Currita has said, is what Garcia Gomez told me."

Currita, who had strong reasons to know that Garcia Gomez must have said something quite different, gave her cigar, which had long since gone out with so much talking, a couple of little puffs, and said to the Countess of Mazacan, very gently: —

"Well, see here! I also have my little complaint against your Garcia Gomez; for, minister of State though he be, he entertains himself in his leisure moments inspecting all the correspondence that comes from Paris. Yes, my dear, don't deny it. In the Black Cabinet all the correspondence is

opened before it reaches its destination, and on that account he was able to say in the Council that a letter came for me yesterday from the Queen, which must prove to the Ministry the absurdity of their pretensions."

Everybody understood, and Butron first of all, to which letter Currita alluded; and they all exclaimed in a general chorus, in which the sordid tones of envy predominated: —

"The Queen has written to you?"

"Yes," replied Currita, "she writes inviting me to the first communion of Prince Alfonso in Rome."

And she looked from head to foot at Izabel Mazacan, whose ill-concealed desire to accompany the dethroned Queen on this expedition was known to all. The latter, who for a long time had been feeling furious itchings in her tongue, was about to discharge some of her crudities; but Butron, not being at all overjoyed to see his diplomatic *coup* shattered, hastened to stop her by leading her to the enclosure of a window, where for some time they discoursed earnestly.

In the meantime Currita, with her vague look fixed on space, as was always her strange custom while speaking, did not lose sight of them, tracing out at the same time her itinerary. In the early part of July she expected to go with Fernandito to Belgium, to spend a short month with Mariano Osuna, in his castle of Beauraing; afterwards she did n't know exactly where she would go, until the 15th of October, the date set for the meeting with the Queen in Marseilles to take the trip to Rome. Perhaps she would go to Trouville. She had spent the preceding summer there, in a beautiful villa opposite the Chalet Cordier which belonged to Monsieur Thiers. To be sure, Thiers was a ridiculous old man, but very congenial, and very honest, in spite of being a Republican; his wife, a *bourgeoise*, so so, in fact rather passable. And the sister-in-law Mlle. Dosne, the President's Egerian nymph? It was most delightful to see her sew the buttons on the coat of her "beau-frère Adolphe." She looked like the housekeeper of a well-to-do notary.

"It was a delicious trio." And with her schoolgirlish

ingenuity Currita then described in all its details a very piquant caricature of the Thiers couple.

"The Duke of Decazes sent me a copy, and I could not resist the temptation to forward it by mail, in a paper wrapper, to Mlle. Dosne. What a face she must have made! — she who is so prudish, so proper!"

And in the next breath, without any transition whatsoever, Currita became profoundly affected at the thought of the immense pleasure she expected to derive in Rome, kissing the sandal of his Holiness, Pope Pius IX. What a gigantic figure that of the Pontiff! What a venerable old man that! And all the ladies began to ponder upon their adhesion to the Holy Pius IX., ready to sacrifice to him life, property, all, everything, with the exception of their souls, they having been already promised of old to the devil. Carmen Tagle said she had always looked upon him as her grandfather; Lopez Moreno's wife added, very much moved, that every year she sent him a barrel of twelve *arrobes*, or three hundred and eighty-four pints, of very rich wine made from the muscatel grapes of her sherry vineyards. The Duchess, really indignant, called to mind the tumults in which, five days before, the multitude had indulged, breaking the illuminated lamps of the fête with which the Catholics were celebrating the anniversary of the Pontificate of the august old man. In the Palace of Medinacoeli alone, they broke twenty-two lamps, and thirty-seven window-panes. And meanwhile the ministers and the authorities solaced themselves with an instrumental concert, given in the palace. What a government this! and what an impious and loathsome populace! At least *they* venerated the person of the Pontiff, and lighted lamps in his honor, only limiting themselves to stoning at all hours the divine law of God whom the former represented. The ladies did not say this, of course, but Don Casimiro Pantojas, who had been attentively listening to them, thought so, without saying so, after having broken off all the ears of an entire family of unfortunate little china rabbits, and pulled off the tails of a little pair of bull-dogs made in Bristol.

At this moment Izabel Mazacan concluded her conversation with the Marquis of Butron, and excusing herself to Currita for not accompanying her on her visit to the Foundling Hospital, as it was already quite late, she left, seemingly somewhat disgusted. Currita then decided to return to her home, and the Marquis of Butron made his adieux at the same time.

"Have you a carriage, Butron?" she asked the diplomat.

"No," hurriedly replied the former, taking advantage of the occasion, which so soon offered itself, of speaking alone with Currita.

"Then I will take you in my brougham wherever you like."

"To the Calle of Izabel la Católica; I have business to attend to at the German Embassy."

"It is just on my way."

Currita descended the stairs leaning on Butron's arm, finding at the foot of them her brougham, an exquisite gewgaw, a veritable toy lined in blue satin with velvet buttons, looking like the delicate case destined to guard a jewel. The diplomat was not quite at ease. As far as he was concerned, it was evident that Izabel Mazacan had not exaggerated or lied, when she repeated what the handsome minister, Garcia Gomez, had told her. But how, then, interpret Currita's sudden change? The opportune letter of Queen Isabella might completely explain it, for, the forgetfulness of the abdication atoned for, and Currita relieved, she might in time renounce her revenge. Tranquil thus far, Butron nevertheless wished to secure more fully to the party Currita's precious alliance; for there are certain indiscreet, and in the long run funereal policies, which, although having honest aims, do not know how to abstract loathsome individualities. To sweep within was Butron's policy, as if the refuse would be of use anywhere, or for any other purpose than to infect the spot which contained it. He came, then, directly to the point; the carriage was no sooner in motion than he asked her categorical explanations of the event, supported by the authority

of his years, by the familiarity of his kinship with Villamelon, and by his dignity as chief of the *Feminine Brigade* of conspirators. But Currita, opening wide her light eyes, and very much frightened and offended, almost crying, contented herself with repeating the story already referred to, with new affirmations and protests. To suppose anything else was a veritable insult. For whom did he take her? Had she not all her life given proofs of the most loyal affection for the royal family? And even if she should be guilty of such infamy, would Fernandito, whose blood had been shed in the *navo-terrestre* combat of Black Cape, at the call of Isabella II., have permitted it? He actually had such a hatred of the intrusive house of Savoy, that he never sealed a letter without standing poor Don Amadeo on his head. What had Izabel Mazacan been telling him, she whose intimacy with the revolutionary minister ought to make her so suspicious? For did not everybody know that the said Countess of Mazacan was an *intrigante*, who had been working for the trip to Rome with the Queen in order to arrange certain difficulties arising out of an old *liaison* with an Italian prince, which she wanted to conceal from Garcia Gomez?

And Currita said such things, and made such protests, emphasizing them with such an accent, that even Butron, notwithstanding his astuteness, was perplexed, and between the contrary affirmations of these two equally deceitful countesses he only obtained a new confirmation of that practical principle which he had professed all his life, that woman abhors the serpent through jealousy and envy of his office.

In the meantime the brougham ran on rapidly, turning corners with those graceful curves which the ready hand of an expert coachman exercises on a fiery team. In the middle of Calle Turca, and dominating the noisy roll of the carriage, a strange, distant rumor reached the ears of the pair, a sort of dull murmur, menacing and awe-inspiring, common only to the boisterous sea and to turbulent multi-

tudes. Currita and Butron looked at each other surprised, and then noticed several stragglers coming hurriedly from Calle Alcala, and the concierge of the School of Engineers, who was hurriedly closing the door of that edifice. This was very common in those days of continual riots, and the brougham advanced without stopping as far as Calle Alcala, so as to turn afterwards into Calle de Barquillo. This, however, was impossible, — a large and compact human cordon, composed of a heterogeneous and motley multitude, filled Calle Alcala throughout its entire extent, from one end to the other as far as the eye could reach. This was a peaceful demonstration of the democracy, which with great shouts, large cudgels, and strange hoisted banners advanced towards the palace, demanding an appointment in the ministry for Don Manuel Ruiz Zorrilla.

Currita's coachman, Tom Sickles, an enormous specimen of the automatic Briton, who clamored for the three-cornered hat and powdered wig, and had sat upon the box of the Duke of Edinburgh's carriage in London, and in Paris on that of the Princess Matilda, headed the horses running parallel to the demonstration, to see if the head of the latter was advancing, and if he could get into the Calle del Caballero de Garcia, or the Calle de Peligros. But it was already too late, and he found himself obliged to stop in front of the Veloz Club, in the midst of the crowd of luxurious equipages returning from La Castellana, and humble cabmen who were trying in vain to cross from one side to the other. Butron wished to hurry back and go out by some side street to the Avenue of San Jeronimo.

"But really, this is very amusing," said Currita, with childish glee. "How charming! Look, Butron; see how pretty they all look with their little pink ribbons! Ugh! that little hunchback! What a monkey! Ah! the rascal! he is carrying a banner on which *Reform* is written. Well, it is quite certain he needs it, poor little thing! — especially for his back."

Another carriage at this moment crossed between the

crowd and the brougham, impeding Currita's view. In it was the Civil Governor of Madrid, very plump and pompous, on his way to the palace; but he also was obliged to stop.

"There goes that mastodon," whispered Butron to Currita. "If he sees us together, he will imagine we are conspiring."

These simple words of the diplomat seemed to awaken in Currita one of those daring ideas which one suddenly conceives, although they may not ripen for years to come. She showed herself at the carriage window as if she wished the Governor to see her, and without acknowledging the respectful salute which he gave upon perceiving her, she drew herself back quickly into the carriage, covering half of her face with her handkerchief, as if trying to conceal herself.

"How badly the democracy smells!" she said, in order to hide from Butron these manœuvres. "What a pest they breed!"

The Governor's carriage at last pulled out laboriously, lengthwise into the street, and from that moment Currita, nervous and agitated, seemed to become very impatient on account of that same delay which had so much amused her a short time before. Opposite her, a little more towards la Puerta del Sol, were seen on the balconies of the Veloz Club under its summer awnings, clusters of idle members, who watched the populace defiling before them, with that species of cowardly curiosity, mocking as well as timid, with which people contemplate from the height of a *tendido* [1] the terrible sports of a herd of ridiculous wild beasts. It seemed impossible to them in that moment that the beasts should ever raise their claws against them.

The sight of these elegant spectators increased Currita's impatience, and she displayed before them in such a manner her anxiety to make an exhibition and distinguish herself, that she almost put the coachman's finger out of joint with

[1] Row of seats for spectators at a bull-fight. — Tr.

the vigorous pull she gave the cord, as she poked her head out of the little window, screaming: —

"Go on, Tom, go on! run through! head them off!"

Tom did not wait for the order to be repeated; he threw out his herculean breast, drawing in the reins with the force of those ancient wagoners sculptured by Phidias on the walls of the Parthenon, who stand in a chariot and control with one hand the gallop of four horses. He chirped to his horses, pulling them back on their hind feet, touched them softly with the whip, and loosening the reins suddenly, sent them flying with the velocity and the impulse of an arrow, through the democratic multitude, disappearing like a flash of lightning down the Calle de Peligros.

A terrible cry of terror and anger rose from the crowd, who staggered from one side to the other of the line opened by the carriage. The people began to run, terrified. The members of the Veloz Club retreated, quickly closing their windows, and the hunchback who begged for *Reform* was on the point of suffering it completely beneath the feet of the horses and the wheels of the brougham.

In the meantime Butron, amazed at this proceeding, and half dead with fright at such audacity and temerity, hastily pulled down the little curtains so that no one would see him, and Currita, laughing like a maniac, looked out of the little window at the back, to see the stragglers fly for refuge to the doorways, and the public guards running behind the brougham making signs for them to stop. But Tom Sickles, attracting attention with his beet-root countenance, made terrible faces, as if the horses were running away with him, while with soft vibrations of the reins he urged them on more and more. In the Calle of Izabel la Católica Tom Sickles performed another feat: carriage and horses came to a sudden stand-still in front of the German Embassy. Madame was served, he meriting the triumphal crown of the Olympic Games.

When Currita reached her home she found three carriages in a line at her door, and immediately recognized on one

of the coachmen the pink cockade common to the Ministry. She alighted in her stable, and went up to her rooms by a staircase reserved for the use of the servants, without being seen by any one. At the sound of her bell, Kate, Madame's English maid, hastened to her.

"Who is with my husband?" she asked.

"The Minister of the Interior. The Duke of Bringas and Don Juan Velarde are playing billiards."

"Tell Don Joselito I cannot receive any one; I have a very bad headache."

Kate seemed to hesitate a moment and decided at last to say timidly: —

"Not even Don Juan Velarde?"

"No; no one! no one!"

Again Kate insinuated with much delicacy: —

"The little master will return to-day from college."

"It is true! Poor Paquito!"

"And he will wish to see Madame —"

"No, no! let him amuse himself with Lili. To-morrow I will see him; I have a horrible headache."

CHAPTER IV

When Paquito Lujan reached his home, it was beginning to grow dark, and the house was already brilliantly lighted. Four large nude statues of white marble adorned the stairway and vestibule, uplifting in their artistic hands bronze candelabra, each containing six branches. At the foot of the staircase, an enormous Norwegian bear, solemnly seated on his hind feet, presented with his fore paws a silver plate destined to receive visiting cards. This was a caprice of the Prince of Wales that Currita had seen in Sandringham Palace, and which she had hastened to copy at all costs.

The child's trouble had disappeared with that happy rapidity with which, in childhood, one emotion succeeds

another. Impatience, that natural impatience, a mixture of a child's love and a longing to be praised, was the emotion which agitated him at this moment, anxious as he was to throw himself with his premiums into the arms of his father and mother and of Lili, the little sister of his heart. Seated on the back seat of the carriage, holding fast his premiums, he pushed his little feet against the seat in front of him, making vigorous efforts to advance, believing that he thus helped the carriage to go more rapidly.

On entering Madrid they lost four minutes in lighting the carriage lamps, and a little farther on, the Custom-House officers again stopped the carriage in order to register everything from top to bottom. How aggravating! and how ugly and stupid those men were! Surely none of them had ever had a father or mother or Lili, or had ever received a single premium in all the days of their lives. When he was big, he would hang all the Custom-House employees, stringing them up like the sausages he had once seen in the majordomo's chimney at Extremadura. Turning the corner of the University a carriage got in the way, afterwards a furniture wagon, and then a big omnibus, and they had to lose another three minutes! When they finally came to the last street the child already had his hand on the handle of the carriage door, ready to open it, showing at the same time his little face at the window; for surely his father, or mother, or Lili, or perhaps all three together would be watching for him from some balcony. He would show them the premiums from the carriage window; and they would think he had only one, but would soon see he had five, and two excellences. What a surprise for them then! But the balconies were all closed, and not a living soul was seen. The carriage turned at last into the *porte-cochère*, making the window-panes of the large vestibule door rattle, and stopped at the foot of the broad, carpeted staircase. This was also deserted, and the boy saw at its foot only the solemn Norwegian bear *Bruin*, as they called him, opening his large mouth armed with enormous teeth, and presenting

him the salver, as if inviting him to deposit his premiums upon it. But he did not do so, and hugging them to his breast he ran up the steps until he reached the vestibule. There a strange figure blocked the entrance, walking up and down with his hands behind his back. It was a hideous, but perfectly proportioned dwarf, a veritable pigmy, rival of the famous *Roby* who was served on the table of the King of Saxony in a venison pie. He was a little over three feet in height, and was correctly dressed *à la mode* in evening attire, white cravat, knee breeches, black silk stockings, and slippers with buckles. He was called Don Joselito, and received a salary of seven thousand reals, with the sole obligation of announcing visitors, and of increasing with his odd figure the reputation of elegant originality which clung to Currita in everything.

The dwarf inclined respectfully before the little gentleman, and with his small, shrill, and somewhat imperious voice, told him he could not see the Countess as she had retired half an hour before with a frightful headache. A sudden cloud of tears darkened the boy's beautiful blue eyes; he turned his back brusquely on the dwarf without saying a word, and ran towards his father's apartments. Villamelon was leaning back at full length in an arm-chair conversing mysteriously with the government minister. The boy rushed to his father and throwing his arms around his neck kissed him twice.

"Well! little man!" exclaimed Villamelon; "back already? I am very glad!"

And as he saw that the child, with a certain bashful pride, presented him with his premiums, he added, without taking them: —

"Well! well! the premiums! poor little fellow! very good, very good, I am pleased. Eh! take this, and tell Germán to take you to the circus to-night."

And giving the child two pesetas,[1] which he took out of his waistcoat pocket, he turned to take up again the thread

[1] The value of a peseta is 19.3 cents. — Tr.

of his mysterious conversation with the minister. The boy stood still a moment, with his eyes wide open. Then suddenly he turned half round on one foot, and red as a pomegranate, reeling as if he was intoxicated, walked towards a little table full of curious knick-knacks. Underneath it was a Japanese figure with its mouth wide open, into which with much dissimulation he threw his father's gift, the two pesetas. Then running headlong out of the little parlor, he stopped a moment in the doorway behind the curtains, and very much oppressed, with his little arms hanging and head bowed, followed a corridor which led to the nursery, that exile and Siberia of children, which the impartial egotism of the Countess of Albornoz had imported from England to her home, for her children.

At one end of the gallery resounded a piano very much out of tune, which seemed to stammer out unwillingly a monotonous theme from Hanon's exercises. Nevertheless, this music sounded like a celestial concert in the ears of the child; his depression disappeared, his joy beamed forth again, and he began to run again in that direction.

"Lili!"

"Paquito!"

An angel, a most beautiful little doll of nine years, jumped from the piano-stool to throw herself into the arms of the boy; then they mingled for a moment their kisses, their shouts, their laughter, and their joys, their pure souls and their innocent lives, as were mingled the golden curls which surrounded, like an aureole of sun's rays, the exquisite heads of both.

Presently the boy remembered his premiums.

"Look! look!"

Lili, astonished, opened her eyes wide, bit her lips, and put her little hands behind her; her criticism was the criticism of great admiration, a monosyllabic criticism.

"Uy!" she said.

"Five! I have five, and two excellences!"

"Will you give me one, Paquito?"

"Silly! These are not given away, they are framed. Pepito Vargas says his mamma puts his in a frame."

"How big?" said Lili, pointing with her little hands to one capable of containing the "Pasmo de Sicilia."[1]

"Yes! very large, and look! this one is for arithmetic, and this —"

He could not continue; a dry hand glued to an immaculate cuff appeared from behind the curtains, then a long arm, and presently a sharp-pointed shoulder, with finally a red countenance, characteristic, original, and as British as Bass's ale or Huntley's biscuits.

"Mademoiselle!" said Lili, frightened.

And the dry hand glued to the immaculate cuff seized the child by one arm, and pulled her inside, while a metallic and strident voice, which rent the ear-drums like a creaking spring, was heard saying: —

"What's this, Miss? You must practise your piano lesson until eight o'clock."

The boy then fled, running blindly on to the nursery, and flung himself head-foremost upon his little white bed, with the irritated bitterness and the dark desperation of the suicide, who throws himself, alone and without hope, into an abyss, obscure, black, and profound. Sleep, blessed sleep, the faithful friend of children, and sweet consoler of all their troubles, came at last to still his sobs and restrain his tears; he slept, even there, without changing his position, still dressed, and with his premiums in his hands.

Meanwhile Villamelon continued his mysterious discourse with the minister. The Marquis was at that time forty years of age, and the ravages of age could be prematurely seen in his countenance. His nose was red and somewhat pimply, his cheeks hollowed, showing the bones, his stomach arched, and everything in him denoted that caricature of

[1] The author refers to the size of the celebrated painting by Raphael in the Madrid Gallery, known in the artistic world as the "Pasmo de Sicilia" (Wonder of Sicily). — Tr.

youth which makes many appear old before their time. His figure had been graceful, and still preserved some vestige of elegance, but his countenance was the perfect image of the dwarf of Philip IV. called "The Cousin," which Velasquez painted, and Goya copied, engraving it in *aqua fortis*. He had the same hooked nose, the same sad eyes, the same twisted moustache, the same extensive and thoughtful forehead, with the single difference that Villamelon parted his already scanty locks in the middle, with a stroke which, beginning at the roots of the hair, reached the occiput, forming over the ears two little horns. This lofty forehead, of large proportions, which claimed for itself the saying of the fox to the bust, "Thy head is handsome, but without brains," had in fact magnificent attributes when furrowed as it was at this moment with a vertical wrinkle, as he bent towards the most Excellent Señor Don Juan Antonio Martinez, Minister of the Interior, and said to him with the air of Bismarck to Gortschakoff upon re-establishing between them European equilibrium:

"Undeceive yourself, Martinez; the thesis of Dr. Wood is absurd. Nobody will prove to me that rat pie is superior to hedge-hog and squirrel pie. You understand me, do you not?"

His Excellency Martinez made a gesture which did not signify whether he understood or not; for from the time the poor gentleman had crossed the natural bridge that leads from the blue bench to the great tables of the Court, he had passed from indigestion to indigestion, and felt in his stomach a longing for his native garlic soups, which had made of him such a robust statesman, and which constituted his daily diet in the times when he tore his first trousers playing with the gamin of a certain beach, on the Asturian coast. Great heavens! what atrocious pains he had had in his stomach from the *pâté de foie-gras* last Friday at the palace! and what a still more terrible attack of colic from *le chou à la crême* which was served two days before at the French Embassy. Martinez thought for a moment he had

been poisoned, and from that time held for his article of faith Addison's principle: —

"When I see fashionable tables, covered with all the delicacies from the four quarters of the globe, I imagine I discern gout, dropsy, fever, lethargy, and the majority of sicknesses hidden in ambush under each cover."

"You will see, Martinez," continued Villamelon; "next Thursday I 'll have the two pies served without saying what they contain, and we 'll see which will be declared the favorite. Do you understand me, Martinez? It is not necessary to say I count on your vote."

The hair of his Excellency stood on end at the prospect of an indigestion of rats. How could he cure himself unless he swallowed a cat?

"And all this," continued Villamelon, with a slight smile, which traitorously denounced his interior conviction of the superiority with which he handled the subject, "is nothing more than English eccentricity, influencing and spoiling their cuisine. And mind, I am impartial; for my cuisine is eclectic, the best in the world, come whence it may; this is my opinion. Do you understand me, Martinez? But there, it is useless to discuss the subject, my friend, for, no matter what people say, in their cooking, as in everything else, France heads the list. This cannot be denied, Martinez. The English devour, the Germans gorge, the Italians eat, the Spaniards nourish themselves, but only the French enjoy, and this is the point, Martinez, — to enjoy eating. Do you understand me?"

Martinez did not understand, and taking offence at what was only a tiresome repetition of speech of Villamelon's, — so much "Martinez," and so much "do you understand?" — he hastened to reply something exasperating: —

"To enjoy? or to burst, Marquis? — which is quite a different thing."

"No! no, no; a thousand times no, Martinez! That is one of many prejudices. Do you understand me? It is quite true that man is a weak, insufficient being, who can

scarcely support eight daily meals; but indigestion does not come from eating much, but from eating badly. Give me a first-class cook, of quality, *d'élan*, and I will guarantee you eternal health. Oh! well did Prince Orloff, with his squint eye and one hand, understand it. I have seen him in Paris select a cook from a public competition; ten went to his palace at the Russian Embassy; I was one of the jury, and we tried before passing sentence one hundred and forty dishes.[1] Ah! no, no, Martinez; it is not eating much that causes indigestion. My sainted mother used to say, "Belly full, praise be to God."

And he became very pompous from the quotation, for one of Villamelon's pleasantries was that of continually mentioning his mother, always prefixing her with the title of "sainted," and putting in her mouth aphorisms very singular, and often in bad taste, like the one just quoted.

At this moment the Duke of Bringas and Juanito Velarde, who had already finished their game of billiards, came in, and very shortly afterwards a servant announced that the Countess would not be present at dinner, having already had a *consommé* in her apartments and retired immediately afterwards with a frightful headache.

This news seemed to affect very little the beloved spouse of the lady, and the Duke of Bringas, but it produced a very bad effect on the Minister of the Interior, making one imagine from his signs of regret that something which Currita's absence completely upset had brought him there, and made him suffer with patience the culinary absurdities of the hero of the *navo-terrestre* combat of Black Cape. As Butron feared, the appointment of first lady-in-waiting was beginning to have its consequences. Juanito Velarde seemed also very much put out, ate little, and spoke less, during the whole course of the dinner.

Villamelon played his usual rôle, brandishing the carving-knife of massive gold, gift of Ferdinand VII., which he had used all his life, and passing through the three distinct

[1] Historical.

phases which in this solemn hour reflected themselves in his person: profoundly engrossed at first, like a man who has on hand a most important business; communicative, but dogmatic, affable, but still circumspect, towards the middle of the dinner; and gay, good-natured, magnanimous, and almost tender, at dessert, as if the current of satisfaction which burst from his stomach endowed him with those qualities, which he did not possess while fasting. This was the hour to ask favors of him, certain of having them granted; and it was also the hour in which Villamelon, dominated by a vicious habit resulting from a very bad education, of which neither his Sainted Mother nor his sweet wife could ever rid him, made little balls out of bread-crumbs with the tips of his fingers, and aimed them at the nostrils of the guests, with signs of the most affectionate kindness and most tender merriment.

Meanwhile, if some small imp could have raised the roof of the Countess of Albornoz's boudoir he would have disclosed a strange scene. The room was lighted by a large lamp, sustained by a nude, life-size negro, admirably carved in ebony. Currita, seated before a small and very low *secrétaire*, seemed to be completely absorbed in a singular caligraphic study, while a very vague smile flitted across her lips, similar, not in its terrible aspect, but at least in cunning and astuteness, to that which the genius of Liezen Mayer put on the lips of Elizabeth of England when representing her in the act of signing the death-warrant of her cousin, Mary Stuart.

In her elegant English hand-writing, fine and clear, she had written on the top of a sheet of paper: "What a handsome animal is man!" and with marvellous facility had continued copying, in all sorts of different letters, this very strange and ambiguous phrase, which seemed to be the reflex of that intimate idea and hidden thought which never forms itself, but is nevertheless the first which every man hastens to imprint, when alone. The inscription multiplied itself, sometimes in chubby and constrained letters, at other times in

large and fine outlines, again in diminutive characters whose little interlaced flies' feet prolonged themselves in the form of a chain-stitch. Currita was employed in this task a full half-hour, with the vigor and attention of a busy little child writing from a copy, or a prudent swindler trying to falsify or disfigure a hand-writing.

At last she seemed to be satisfied with her efforts, and with the chain-stitch and flies'-feet writings, which had not the remotest point of resemblance to her usual hand-writing, she began to write a letter on a sheet of plain paper, without crest or monogram of any description; the letter was not long, and on the envelope was written: —

"His Excellency the Civil Governor
of
Madrid."

It yet remained to be sealed, and Currita, with a cunning smile, stamped it, taking care to place the bust of King Don Amadeo on his head, and making it fast with two or three little impressions of her closed fist, which seemed to take great pleasure in plastering the noble monarch, beginning and end of the Savoyan dynasty.

Any one would have thought from this that the business was finished, and that it was only necessary to call a servant to post the mysterious letter. But the illustrious Countess judged otherwise: she went into the adjoining room, which was her bedroom, and came out again at the end of a full quarter of an hour, completely transformed. She had taken off her elegant street gown, and put on in its stead a very plain black woollen skirt and a shabby mantilla, which hid part of her face. In one hand she carried a lighted candle in a silver candlestick, and in the other a very large key. She picked up the letter and walked out of the room; at this moment a distant clock struck half-past eleven.

Villamelon's house was one of those old mansions, now rare in Madrid, with wide corridors, spacious drawing-rooms, and comfortable apartments, surrounded on all sides by

small, narrow passage-ways, and private staircases for the use of the servants. Currita's apartments communicated with Villamelon's by the sleeping-room, and by a room contiguous to the bath-room, with a long passage-way. This terminated on one side with Kate's, the English maid's, room, and on the other by a narrow little staircase, which led to a very narrow little garden. Closing the bedroom door, the one in the middle of the passage-way, and the one which put the boudoir in communication with the two front drawing-rooms, the rest of Currita's apartments remained completely isolated and in direct communication with the street, into which a little gate opened, cut in the wall of the garden to the rear of the palace and behind a little winter sheep-fold. Currita, after extinguishing the light at the foot of the stairs, walked towards the gate with such freedom and such graceful effrontery that one could tell very well this was not the first of her nocturnal escapades.

The night was dark, and the solitary plaza upon which the garden gate opened lost itself in the distance among houses in the course of construction, lighted here and there by a few lanterns, whose light seemed to shine in the midst of a haze of yellowish vapor. The open door of a store of ultramarine on the next corner revealed a picture of brilliant light, and one could see the shop-keeper in the background, immovable behind the counter, adjusting his accounts. About forty steps below a scaffolding, a lantern threw into relief the black silhouettes of a man in a short jacket and a girl in a starched skirt, engaged in a most earnest dialogue. Everything else appeared dark and deserted, having an uneasy aspect of panoramic view, which was completed by the sound of a piano in the distance, proceeding from a fourth story, and badly out of tune, upon which reckless hands were murdering Bellini's immortal cavatina, "*Casta diva che inargenti.*"

The Countess, the great lady, who so seldom descended from her carriage, as if she disdained to tread with her elegant *brodequins* the dust of which she was made, threaded

these dark rough roads, crossed several lanes deserted at this hour, which seemed to be very well known to her, and finally emerged into the little plaza of Santo Domingo. The concourse of people was still considerable in this always much thronged thoroughfare, and Currita went down the hill, in order to get into the shelter of the little garden of la Costanilla de los Angeles. She rapidly crossed la Calle del Arenal, turned into Calle de los Fuentes, and making a big circuit back of the Ministry of the Interior finally reached la Calle de las Carretas, and deposited with her own hand the mysterious letter in the post-office box. If this woman was a criminal, she belonged without doubt to that class of practical and prudent criminals, who see in every accomplice a dangerous road which leads to prison.

She now undertook her homeward journey, returning through the streets by which she had come, without encountering more than one obstacle. An old man of very decent aspect stopped suddenly before her. Currita, surprised, kept close to the wall, and the man then made a motion to give her a coin of five centimes, a *perra-chica*, as it was then called, and which is even to-day the name given to these small pieces. He had taken her for one of those miserable women who, in the small hours of the night, extend in silence their emaciated hands to the passers-by, who go on their way solicited by rest or lured by vice.

At least the Countess understood it so, and with a great inclination to laugh took the money, still having courage to profane with her impure lips that beautiful prayer and holy response which Faith gives to her sister Charity through the humble mouth of the poor: —

"God will reward you!"

When the Countess entered her boudoir, the latter presented a sinister aspect: the lamp was dying out in the hands of the negro, whose white teeth of incrusted marble stood out in the darkness like the smile of an evil genius amusing himself in the infernal regions. Three hours afterwards, screams and lamentations resounded from the other

side of the house. It was Paquito Lujan, who, numbed by the freshness of the dawn, and terrified by the darkness, awoke there in the nursery, forgotten by the father and mother who had given him being, and the seventeen servants dedicated to their service.

CHAPTER V

The Countess of Albornoz was greatly amused the following day, upon hearing her son Paquito relate his strange adventures of the preceding night, when, upon finding himself alone, and in the dark, dressed, and lying in a bed which was not his college bed, he began to scream, full of anguish, without any one answering his cries. Miss Buteffull heard them from her bed, and at once understood the cause; probably no one in the house remembered that the poor child had returned from college; perhaps he had been taken suddenly ill; or perhaps burglars had entered his room, and were assassinating him. Miss Buteffull felt sorry and lighted the candle in her candlestick. A decorous reflection suddenly stopped her; the case was serious; she was forty-five years old, the boy eleven, and the hour of the night was advanced. Should she enter his room alone? Miss Buteffull extinguished the candle.

Meanwhile the boy's despairing cries also awoke Magdalena, Lili's maid, who slept near-by, and the latter ran quickly to his assistance. She quieted him with great kindness, made him lie down, and remained seated by his little bed until he went to sleep again. This report produced in Currita one of those sudden fits of maternal love which used to attack her frequently in her days of despondency. She was accustomed to pass at such times whole hours in the nursery, playing with her children, eating them up with kisses, calling them her little pigeons, having costly toys and

all kinds of sweetmeats brought to them, and amusing herself by making fun of Miss Buteffull, and reviling the fathers of the College, destroying in half an hour all the good which, at the cost of much labor, these had sown and would continue to sow in the tender hearts of both children; for one of the great rocks against which the efforts of those dedicated to education stumble consists in the imprudent and culpable levity in which many parents delight, in presenting before their children their preceptors or teachers, not as intimate friends, intrusted to guide their steps, nor as beneficent beings who confer upon them the signal favor of forming their hearts and enlightening their understandings, but as tyrants who oppress and mortify them, and as jailers whose vigilance must be evaded by stratagems or tricks more or less innocent. In this way is destroyed the good opinion necessary to all those who command in order to be respected; the human faith indispensable to all those who teach in order to be believed; and only one thing exists, in our opinion, which is as prejudicial to education as this is; the combat which the child at times discovers between the morals of his parents and the morals of his teachers. It is impossible to describe the anguishing perplexities and sorrowful doubts which with very sad frequency these contradictions awaken in the souls of children: one sees in them the struggle of the understanding with the heart, the former showing that the doctrine of the teacher is sound, the latter endeavoring to persuade them that the contrary practices of the father, or mother, whom they love so much, cannot be bad, and that that thing cannot be certain which, from the very fact of being so, gives irremediably to those much beloved beings the patent of perverseness. Ah! never will the writer of these lines forget the affliction of a poor child, model of innocence and judgment, upon hearing a certain lesson in the catechism explained; the boy sat for a while very pensive, but presently little by little began to grieve, until finally he exclaimed, convulsed, with his heart contracted, eyes full of tears, and his little hands trembling:

"Then — then — my papa is very, very bad — and he will go to hell!"

All this mattered very little to Currita, and her intermittent hailstorm of kisses, pettings, and indiscretions completely effaced in Lili's candid soul her mother's long neglect and indifferent egotism; but these tempestuous outbursts did not succeed in the same way with the boy. In the depths of that tender little heart was a hidden little corner in which memory was depositing with implacable fidelity a list of all the insults, like a grain of poisonous seed amidst healthful vegetation, or a sprout of poisonous hemlock, which would arouse in this virgin soil a sombre rancor, silent and patient, like a sinister tree which produces in the long run the venomous fruits of hatred. As yet this angelical little heart pardoned easily all that it considered an injury, but it had already taken a step forward, and it was impossible now to forget entirely.

It was not, however, despondency which had brought the Countess of Albornoz on this particular morning to entertain herself with her children. She seemed, on the contrary, preoccupied and a bit restless; one could see in her that nervous agitation which affects all those who expect anything they fear, or which is of importance to them. Lili had a very happy idea: she proposed to her mother to have Paquito photographed with his premiums. The boy grew scarlet, and shook his head negatively.

"Why, that's so!" exclaimed Currita, enchanted. "This very minute. You will see how pretty they will be. Germán, tell the Marquis we are coming up to his gallery to be photographed."

The boy, upon hearing this, tore himself away from Lili's arms, who jumping for joy had embraced him, and exclaimed with energetic wrath: "No! no! not papa!"

"But why not?" said Currita, surprised, grasping him by the arm.

The child, crimson, and very much affected, struggled to free himself, his beautiful eyes full of tears.

"Why not? why not?" repeated Currita.

"He told me to go away! He gave me two pesetas!" cried the boy at last, with great affliction; and sobbing bitterly, hid his little face on his mother's breast.

What a ray of light would not this child's lament have been to one of those holy and prudent mothers who study and direct their children's slightest heart-beat. In it was revealed a noble punctiliousness already treading the path of pride, and a precocious propensity for vengeance, which, hidden and patient, awaits the hour to return slight for slight and injury for injury. But Currita only saw in all this a voluntary childish caprice, and between caresses and persuasions, cajoleries and threats, she tried to induce the child to have his picture taken. The latter apparently yielded, and Currita, holding the two children by the hand, went up to the splendid apartment in which the Marquis of Villamelon had his photographic studio.

For idleness, that common affliction of the great, which instead of tears produces yawns, had awakened in the illustrious nobleman and unconquerable warrior a taste for photography, not finding in himself the necessary aptitude for the cultivation of other more elevated arts. To eat, drink, sleep, and to photograph every living insect which passed before the magnificent lens of his camera obscura, were the useful tasks which filled, and even overflowed the life of this illustrious nobleman, whose ancestors had played such a part in the glorious enterprises of ancient Spain.

Villamelon hastened, therefore, as usual, to comply with Currita's slightest request, enveloped in his new Scotch morning-gown, which scarcely met at the waist. He had with him one of those magnificent large dogs of Kamschatka, of a yellowish white, who draw heavy sledges in their own country, and who had been Currita's constant attendant for a long space of time, during which it had seemed to her exceedingly *chic* to take lengthy excursions on horseback. Villamelon began without loss of time to prepare the cam-

era, his fingers stained with nitrate of silver. Currita meanwhile disposed the artistic group in which the children were to be photographed. She arranged in the centre a large gothic seat, a very valuable archæological and artistic treasure; while both children, ensconced in it in close embrace, were supposed to be examining together the premiums and the boy's diploma. They presented a fac-simile of a very beautiful miniature of the fifteenth century. Extended at full length before them was Tock, the big yellow dog, his nose propped up on the red velvet cushion upon which the children's feet rested.

"Delicious!" exclaimed Currita, enchanted. "Look, Fernandito, it is like one of Meissonier's pictures." The premiums, however, were not forthcoming, and Paquito, shrugging his shoulders, pretended not to know where he had put them.

"Silly!" cried Lili, giving him a tap; "of course you left them downstairs."

In less than two minutes she went and brought them, very much surprised that the vivid colors of the diploma should be discolored in several places as if by drops of water. The boy blushed and said nothing; his tears of the preceding night were the cause of those stains. At this moment a servant announced to Currita that the Minister of the Interior desired urgently to speak with her. She turned brusquely towards her husband, dropping the diploma she held in her hand, while Villamelon, frightened, straightened himself up, the black cloth with which he had covered himself to focus the camera remaining on his head. From beneath it appeared his black whiskers, hooked nose, and eyes, terrified at this moment, fixed on Currita with the timorous expression of the indolent scholar seized unawares. The wife advanced two steps towards her husband, the wrath which flashed from her light eyes giving the lie to the soft little voice and the deliberate tone with which she said: —

"Did not that Apis ox dine here yesterday?"

"He is a beast," replied her husband; and to hide his

embarrassment, he disappeared beneath the black cloth, beginning anew to focus the camera.

"Listen to me, Fernandito, when I am speaking to you," added Currita, with an affected pause.

Fernandito straightened himself up again, each time more embarrassed, without taking the black cloth off his head.

"Did the Apis ox say anything last night about the appointment?"

"Nothing," stammered Villamelon.

"Nothing? Are you sure?"

Villamelon's lips trembled, like those of a child who is about to tell a lie. But thinking better of it, no doubt, Fernandito remembered at length that the Minister of the Interior, the Apis ox, as they called him on account of his corpulency, had only told him that the rat pie would doubtless be very indigestible. What foolishness! On the other hand, he had declared to Juanito Velarde that things could not remain as they were, that no one could make fun of the government with impunity, and that he had decided to demand of Currita the acceptance of the appointment, supporting himself by a letter which, he said, — in a very unministerial expression, — he had to rub her nose with.

"A letter?" exclaimed Currita, really surprised; "but from whom?"

"From me! from me!" stammered Villamelon; and knowing that with this the thunderbolt had been discharged, he begged the earth to swallow him up. But the earth did not find it convenient to accommodate him. Currita advanced two more tiny little steps, and softening more and more her accent as she became more and more angry, she added: —

"Did you write to him, Fernandito?"

Villamelon bowed his head, annihilated.

"And did I not tell you, you must talk to him? That in all this business not a single written word must appear? You see, Fernandito —"

Villamelon retreated a step, as one who expects a box

on the ear, and Currita advanced another, saying after a pause: —

"And he said he was going to — to — present me that letter?"

"So Velarde said."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

Villamelon took another step backwards, and Currita another step forwards, repeating in a voice so soft it seemed almost like a caress: —

"You see? You see, Fernandito?"

And suddenly pulling the black cloth with an angry jerk, she enveloped the head of her illustrious husband in the sort of bag which it formed. Then slowly turning her back and without losing her composure she walked out of the studio. Lili burst out laughing to see her father struggling to get his head out of the black bag, and ran to Paquito to whisper to him a very great secret: —

"What a goose papa is!"

Paquito was not listening to her, however. During all this scene he had been arranging in the gothic seat Tock, the big yellow dog, who allowed himself to be managed with that kind of gentle patience which dogs affect with children. He then suspended from his collar of repoussé iron his prizes, the five medals, and putting the diploma on the dog's head in the form of a cornucopia, cried out to Lili in a strange voice: —

"Go! — Let papa photograph him! — I have given all my premiums to Tock!"

Meanwhile the butler was astonished to hear his mistress give, in passing, the strange order to light without loss of time the fire in the boudoir. It was the 25th of June, and the heat was already beginning to be suffocating. He obeyed, however, with that species of automatic impassibility peculiar to the servants of great houses; and when his Excellency the Minister of the Interior, Don Juan Antonio Martinez, Apis ox, in other words, entered the boudoir, a splendid fire

was already burning in the grate, and near it Currita awaited him, extended in a lounging-chair, enveloped in a satin morning-wrapper, completely gloved, her feet covered with a very fine Scotch plaid, her head resting on a large cushion, with pink ribbons. Extending upon his entrance her slender little hand, she said in the weak voice of a confirmed invalid: —

"How are you, Martinez? You only would I have received to-day."

The Apis ox growled, a faithful expression of his astonishment and surprise, gave a sudden start, and, glued to the spot, began to perspire at the sight of the lighted grate.

"But what does all this mean, Countess?" he exclaimed disconsolately. "You still have the headache?"

"I am so unfortunate, so unfortunate," answered Currita. "I am afraid I have chills and fever."

And the cunning one shivered all over her small, weak body, pointing out to the minister at the same time a little settee placed near the fire, and within reach of her hand. Martinez seated himself upon it, ready to be roasted on his soft seat, like Saint Lawrence on the gridiron.

"I am so sorry, so sincerely sorry," he said, and with really progressive sincerity added, recollecting the rustic pharmacopœia of his native country: —

"Why don't you put two little potato plasters on your temples? They give great relief."

"Potatoes!" exclaimed Currita, shivering with fright. "For Heaven's sake, Martinez! — I prefer the headache."

Martinez, understanding that he had revealed the village ear beneath the skin of the Court minister, came to business, leaving aside compassionate preambles and household prescriptions.

"I am very sorry to have to come, then, to increase the headache, but the business is important and urgent."

The Countess settled her little red head on her soft cushion with pink ribbons, and fixed upon the minister her light eyes, which admirably expressed wonder. Martinez

made fast his gold spectacles, twisted his disproportioned head, and menacing Currita with his big fat finger, like the dominie who gives a child an affectionate reprimand, said to her: —

"They are very much annoyed at the palace."

Currita shrugged her shoulders, making a graceful grimace, as if to say: —

"But why do you tell me this?"

"Yes, madame," continued the minister, "his Majesty the King and her Majesty the Queen are very much put out."

Currita was seized with a great inclination to laugh at the pompous inflation with which the democratic minister pronounced these sonorous words: "palace," "Majesty," "King," "Queen," which seemed to fill his large, wide mouth, and asked with her accustomed suavity: —

"Who? The Cisterna!"

The minister swelled like a Veraguas bull in whom a spear is implanted.

"No! madame," he exclaimed, offended in his dynastic dignity; "her Majesty, the Queen of Spain, Doña Maria Victoria."

"Ah!" said Currita. "And what have I to do with the sentiments of that lady?"

"What have you to do?" exclaimed the minister, suffocated by the heat of the fire and Currita's exasperating calm. "And does it seem nothing to you to solicit the position of first lady-in-waiting in order to reject it afterwards, when it has been conceded? Does one play like that with a Queen who is a model of virtue? You must know, then, that the Government has unanimously decided to compel your acceptance."

And the minister, completely upset, perspiring in big drops, red as a beet, and with both fists resting on his respective knees, fixed upon Currita his squint eyes, as if he would try to swallow her up in a single mouthful. The growls of the Apis ox, however, did not intimidate her.

She raised herself a little, and, very much astonished and offended, with her light eyes fixed, as always, on space, began to say in her soft and somewhat aggrieved little voice: —

"But, Martinez, for Heaven's sake, don't excite yourself in that manner. You look so ugly. There must be some mistake in all this, some *quid pro quo*, for a man of your intellect to talk such nonsense. I, first lady-in-waiting to the Cister — I mean to say, to Doña Victoria. Where did you hear that?"

"From you yourself, my lady Countess, from you yourself," cried the minister. "Will you dare to deny, before the minister of Ultramar, that you have solicited the position of first lady-in-waiting, provided they give to Velarde the secretaryship to the King, and to yourself six thousand dollars salary?"

"Well, I should think I would deny it," answered Currita, with all her pertness.

"Yes? Well, we 'll see if your husband will deny it also, when all the papers of Madrid publish this letter."

And the Apis ox took out of his pocket a letter, which he unfolded before Currita's eyes, as if he would like to accomplish his bestial menace of rubbing her nose with it. The Countess was about to snatch the paper hastily, but the minister held it back, saying brutally: —

"Bah! this does not leave me for one instant; but this very minute you shall hear it from beginning to end."

And putting his spectacles on his nose, for he was near-sighted, he began to read the letter. In it the Marquis of Villamelon, in union with his wife, asked for the latter, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the position of first lady-in-waiting to the Queen, under the two conditions before mentioned by Martinez, — the private secretaryship to Don Amadeo for Juanito Velarde, and the six thousand dollars salary for the lady herself. The proof could not be more conclusive, and Currita could well understand all her dear husband's imprudence in letting such a pledge escape

him. She was not much affected, however. While the minister was reading, she had been raising herself more and more, making *moues* of fright and gestures of protest, and suddenly, with the agility of a chasing cat, who springs upon the incautious mouse, she snatched from the minister's hands the dangerous letter and threw it into the fire. The paper curled up a moment in the flames, the next instant being converted into ashes.

The minister, astonished, fell back brusquely in his seat with an oath; but Currita, without being offended on that account, or frightened either, sank back again on her pillows, as if it was nothing, saying with her frank little laugh: —

"Come, come, Martinez! You must put two little potato plasters on. They are very refreshing!"

CHAPTER VI

Never had Villamelon's pacific porter experienced such a tremendous fright as that which the Governor of Madrid had in store for him on that memorable day following Martinez' visit to Currita the 26th of June. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and Baltasar, not having as yet put on his heavy blue livery covered with heraldic scutcheons, and wide fringes at the wrists and collar, was carefully dusting the proud Florentine coffers, enormous antique seats, and the armor of brilliant steel which adorned the vestibule. Afterwards he began to comb the long wool of Bruin, his mute companion the Norwegian bear, and was thus employed when a troop of suspicious-looking people, with an aspect anything but tranquillizing, suddenly invaded the house. Baltasar, frightened, quickly shut the large glass door; but, from the repeated blows showered upon it by those who were outside, two of the magnificent panes of emerald glass which displayed in the middle Villamelon's monogram and crest

fell shattered into pieces. Baltasar, terrified, fled up the stairs with his coarse apron tucked up, trampling upon the diminutive Don Joselito, who was peacefully rubbing with a lemon peel the metallic rods which kept in place the soft carpet on the staircase. The dwarf fled also, shrieking at the top of his voice, and very soon the entire corps of servants in the palace was running terrified in all directions, opening and shutting doors, and spreading the alarm throughout the whole building.

Meanwhile the invaders reached an antechamber which was completely deserted, and he who appeared to be in command began to knock on the floor with his tasselled stick, demanding the Countess of Albornoz in the name of the law. This person was the chief of police, and came in the name of the Governor to inspect the palace of the Countess, and to possess himself of all her papers. Accompanying him were half a dozen municipal guards, an *alcalde* of the neighborhood, and about ten or twelve men of villanous countenances, provided with large cudgels, who seemed by their aspect to belong to the, at that time, famous *partida de la porra*.[1] They guarded all the doors, leaving the entrance free to all, while exit was prohibited.

Meanwhile Villamelon was sleeping the sleep of the just. Currita, on the other hand, up very early, contrary to her usual custom, as if she was expecting something, immediately noticed the tumult. She turned very pale, and an impish smile flitted for a moment across her thin lips. Kate, the English maid, trembling like a leaf, hastened to tell her of what had occurred. The lady then seemed to be very much frightened, as if she had only just heard the news, and wished in all haste to advise the Marquis of Butron of what was going on. The doors were, however, already guarded and exit forbidden. She, however, in spite of all, ordered one of the kitchen scullions to scale the garden wall, charged to deliver her message to the diplomat.

Villamelon's awakening was horrible. The image of terror

[1] Band of ruffians. — Tr.

had remained of old engraven upon his brain, under the form of the savage natives of Africa, and these, with their rifles, were the first phantoms which presented themselves to his imagination in this moment of confusion of ideas which follows the awakening of every man. His Excellency Martinez, the colossal Apis ox, next stood out among them, presenting him with one hand his imprudent letter, and seizing his throat with the other, to conduct him without mercy to the Saladero. Villamelon was ready to die of fright, for to his letter, and to his letter alone, as Currita had well prophesied the day before, could he attribute this sudden invasion of the police. Presently, very quickly indeed, he resolved what to do. He tucked himself up again in bed and decided that the most prudent thing would be to feign death then and there. Was it not Currita who had involved him in these difficulties ? Well, let her get out of them the best way she could! In vain the Countess, trembling with wrath, urged him to get up and go out to receive the crowd of vagrants. Villamelon answered that he had a cold, and was in a sweat, and would certainly have a spasm if he went into a draught.

Time pressed, and the intrepid Currita saw herself at last obliged to go out in person to meet the invaders. The widow of Padilla could not have done so with more arrogance upon presenting herself to the troops of Carlos V., in the Alcazar of Toledo. With haughty mien she asked the chief of police for the Governor's mandate legalized by the judge, the only one, according to the laws in force, which could authorize this intrusion. The functionary presented it to her respectfully, and she tore it in two after reading it. She then made a valiant protest, in which she put forth her loyal Alfonsist opinions, and sending an old man employed in the accountant's office of the palace, to show these people the way to her rooms, and to be present at the registration, she retired with dignity to the billiard-room, followed by her maids, like a queen by her ladies. There she made them bring to her the two children, Lili and Paquito, and embracing them

tenderly, and seating them on her lap, seemed to parody the sad group of Queen Marie Antoinette flying for refuge with her children to a corner of the Tuileries, invaded by the populace. Kate cried disconsolately; Miss Buteffull had put on her hat and gloves, as if she expected the order to march.

Currita did not make these sentimentally artistic arrangements for nothing. The news had flown in a twinkling throughout the political and aristocratic circles of the Court, extending afterwards through cafés and casinos, stores and plazas. People began to crowd with stupid curiosity about the doors of the palace, and very soon a long line of carriages occupied the entire street, suspending for a moment their measured march, doors opening and shutting with much clamor, while aristocratic young bloods, haughty noblemen, and elegant ladies descended from them. The latter came *en déshabille*, glancing in all directions half frightened and half curious, and embraced Currita amidst exclamations of surprise, indignation, enthusiasm, and pity. This is what the sly Countess expected; and with her *ingénu* smile pressed the hands of some in silence, and to others related the account of the invasion, raising her eyes to heaven with the air of a resigned victim, who, clinging to her children, sacrifices herself on the altars of the proscribed dynasty. What would become of them? Her poor children! And Fernandito so affected, so nervous, prostrated in bed, and his health needing serious care! Perhaps exile awaited them, perhaps prison, perhaps — Ah! the ladies shuddered with fury and fright, all talking at once, comforting the victim with their advice, and all cursing themselves inwardly because Currita, and not themselves, had had the luck to place herself under the suspicion of the police, and had attained the height of celebrity with a single bound.

There also arrived several reporters in quest of news, pencil in hand, and their pride in their pockets. They were very well received, Currita herself deigning to give them particulars of the event. Admirable was Pedro Lopez, the

chronicler of elegant salons, who attended balls and dinners with the pockets of his dress coat lined with oil-cloth, to be able to take away sweets and confections without difficulty. Currita extended to him her hand, moved at the sight of this faithful friend, who so many times had described the beauties of her costumes; he pressed it in silence, repeating three times: —

"Ominous! — ominous! — ominous!"

And retiring to some distance he began to scribble with febrile ardor in his portfolio. All the ladies and many of the gentlemen flocked around him to be seen, and to beg an honorable mention in this article, which would the following day be the theme *par excellence* of the Court. Currita's apotheosis would undoubtedly cause a great sensation, and they ought to figure in it, if only in the chorus.

Leopoldina Pastor arrived out of breath, with an enormous prayer-book in her hand. She had just come from mass, for she was making a novena to San Pascual to entreat of heaven to send a stroke of fulminant apoplexy to Don Salustiano de Olozaga. She was very much irritated that Currita had not thrown the chief of police out of the window. She swore that this good-for-nothing should not escape without hearing from her lips four well pronounced words, and making a great fuss and gesticulating, and sticking her tongue out at the agents of police whom she met on her way, finally stopped at the dining-room, for it was already twelve o'clock. She had had nothing to eat, was very hungry, and it would be impossible to leave the house until the registration was finished. Many men and women followed her, ready to pounce upon Villamelon's provisions like a cloud of locusts. The astonishment of all was great to find the dying Marquis standing in a corner of the dining-room, leaning over an oak platter, swallowing eagerly and in all haste an immense mug of delicious chocolate, with a colossal pyramid of golden toast, and glancing in all directions terrified. The first fright having left him, and not hearing now any unusual noise in the house other than the incessant going and coming

of the people who had come in from the street, Villamelon felt sensibly the most terrible sting that could possibly attack him, the sting of hunger! In vain he called for them to bring him as usual —

> "A wide waiter with Chinese pitcher
> Brimming over with boiling chocolate."

The servants scattered throughout the house did not respond to his call, and Villamelon, preferring the risk of any other death to the death of starvation, decided at last to get up, and to slip along passages and corridors to the kitchen in search of his daily bread. Once in possession of it he fled to the nearest corner, and there began to devour it.

The arrival of the importunate guests made him clear the field, fleeing toward the interior, with the chocolate in one hand, and the toast in the other. But with roars of laughter the aristocratic and hungry crowd stopped him, and Leopoldina Pastor, grasping him by the short coat-tails of his morning-gown, cried out convulsed with laughter: —

"Where are you going, Fernandito? don't leave, man! To be able to grieve, one must eat of course, and we have come to help you."

And from the *maître d'hôtel* to Don Joselito they set to work, barely able to supply the emotional throng with an improvised luncheon, and substantial picnic.

CHAPTER VII

The Marquis of Butron was one of those mediocrities who, in times scarce of notabilities, pass for remarkable men, owing their greatness to the small proportions alone of the men and affairs of their epoch. It has been said, however, that no man is great in the eyes of his valet, and the renowned Robinson was not exempt from this general law of illustrious celebrities. One of his principal weaknesses, therefore, con-

sisted in carefully dyeing his beard, already completely white, in order to make it match his yet abundant crop of hair, which he had preserved as black as the wings of a crow. The worthy diplomat was engaged on the morning of the 26th of June in this most important task, when Currita's message was suddenly delivered to him. The hairy gentleman completely lost his head, and fearing everything from the Countess's duplicity, of which he was fully aware, he hastily ordered a cab and drove to the palace of this stray sheep, whom it was so essential for him to keep in the Alfonsist fold, completely forgetting that his undyed beard would reveal his secret, until then well guarded, to the most expert tongues to be found in the court for tearing people to pieces. The policemen who guarded the door allowed him to pass, according to the countersign, regarding him with that species of jealous respect which the leaders of one party always inspire in the small fry of the opposite side.

The announcement of his arrival caused a profound sensation among his hosts of friends, men and women, who thronged the palace, and all, even those in the dining-room, hastened forward to meet him. His presence there gave to the event an importance and a color, which Currita had well calculated in sending for him in such haste. The great Robinson extended both arms upon seeing her, exclaiming, "My daughter!" and the lady fell into them with filial abandon, sobbing loudly and pointing to her children, who clung frightened to Miss Buteffull's skirt; the latter as inflexible and impassible as ever.

The ladies began to sympathize in a general chorus, but Gorito Sardona, happening to notice the diplomat's undyed beard, hurried to communicate the discovery to Carmen Tagle. She burst out laughing, and told it to her neighbor, who passed it on to the person next to her, and very soon a number of sly little giggles made a complete fracas of the pathetic part of the spectacle. Butron, however, was oblivious to all this, and with the majestic mien which circumstances required, gently led Currita into an adjoining

room. He was perspiring profusely, so fearful was he, lest some new whim of the illustrious Countess should upset his diplomatic manœuvres. Terrified, glancing in every direction, as if he feared to encounter the guards who invaded the palace, he said to her in a low voice: —

"What is the meaning of all this? Speak, my daughter!"

Currita threw herself on a sofa, covering her face with her handkerchief.

"I am lost!" she said.

Butron opened his mouth, as if about to swallow a whole cheese.

"Fernandito is an imbecile!" continued Currita, very much affected.

Butron nodded his head in signal of profound assent.

"Martinez has deceived him! And Fernandito has compromised me atrociously. It is horrible, Butron, horrible."

"Speak low!" exclaimed the diplomat, startled. "Calm yourself, my daughter, calm yourself; you can depend upon me for everything. Do you hear? for everything."

And with his two hairy hands Robinson squeezed with paternal effusion the hand of Currita.

"I know it, Butron, I know it, and that is why I sent for you at once," she said more calmly. "But it is shameful, shameful! Just imagine, if you can, that all they have said about my appointment as first lady-in-waiting is true!"

"True!" exclaimed Butron, as if the cheese had stuck in his throat.

"Fernandito wrote to the minister soliciting for me the appointment without saying a word to me, Butron!— without consulting me! Oh! it is too much, too much! Ah! what a husband! I assure you, if it were not for my children I would bring on a divorce."

Here Currita shed a few tears on the altars of honored Hymen, whose torch ran the risk of being extinguished, and continued in a very low voice: —

"So, as I knew nothing, I said day before yesterday in

Beatrice's house what I thought, of course, was the truth: that the minister came to offer me the position, and that I had indignantly declined to accept it, regarding it as one of the absurdities of that mob. Imagine, then, my surprise when yesterday that beast Martinez, so ordinary and gross, entered my house very much offended by my refusal, shouting like one possessed by the devil that no one could play with the Government like that, and threatening me with a letter of Fernandito's, which he said he was going to rub my nose with — Butron, my nose!" And here tears again drowned Currita's voice; after a pause she continued between sobs: —

"What an outrage, Butron, what a shame! I thought I should die of grief! To the father of my children I owe this injury. Well do I know, I have said to him a thousand times, 'Your condescension to that rabble, Fernandito, will ruin us.'"

"Did you see the letter?" exclaimed Butron, stupefied.

"I saw it, Butron; I read it! How shameful! I thought I should die! The Apis ox said the minister would publish it in the papers if I did not accept the position. I cried, I entreated, beseeching him in the name of my honor, in the name of my children! All in vain. Either I must accept the position or the letter must be published. Then I offered money, and my man began to soften. He demanded of me five thousand duros, then three thousand, — haggling, Butron, haggling like a Jew! At last the bargain was closed at three thousand, and last night at one o'clock he came to deliver me the letter and receive the payment. As I did not have sufficient money by me, and could not ask it of Fernandito, I was obliged to pawn a number of jewels."

Butron listened astonished, swallowing one by one all this string of lies, dexterously intermixed with some few truths. He crossed his hands in a tragic attitude, and exclaimed with the air of a scandalized Cato: —

"This is nauseating!"

"But that is not all, Butron, not all. It is scandalous!"

continued Currita, very much excited. "At one o'clock last night the Apis ox delivered me the letter. At ten o'clock this morning the officials of police suddenly arrived to register my papers. A round business which the great scoundrel seeks, — to get the letter again, and keep my money!"

"But have they got it?" exclaimed Butron in consternation.

"Bah! I would have sacrificed my life first. I had time to tear it up and throw the pieces down the drain of the bath."

"Berrerr!" said Butron, as if he had nausea; and with his hands crossed behind his back, in an attitude of great perplexity, and the formidable furrow of his eyebrows knit, a sign in him of grave preoccupation, he began to measure the room with long strides. Currita watched him pacing up and down, out of the corner of her eye, every now and then sighing nervously.

It was apparent to Butron that the lady was a trickster; but what she said was all perfectly consistent and completely explained the strange visit of the police. For what other reason would they search the house? On the other hand the unexpected event secured to the party the alliance of this woman who reigned over elegant Madrid, with the powerful empire of fashion, and this was sufficient for the theories of the diplomat. He stopped, therefore, suddenly before her and said to her solemnly: —

"It is necessary to make an imposing display, which will arouse the spirit of the people, and serve as a protest against this outrage."

Currita shrugged her shoulders, hiding beneath an affected perplexity the ray of vain joy which lit up her countenance.

"But, Butron, for Heaven's sake!" she said, "as far as I am concerned, I have no objection, but you must see that the one who loses here is Fernandito."

"Look, Curra! Fernandito does n't lose anything, for he has nothing to lose. Your husband is an imbecile, and everybody knows it."

"It is true," said Currita, with heroic conformity.

"Moreover, I will guarantee you a secret. The business is serious, and we may profit greatly by it."

"I can well understand that; and so I am not opposed. After all, the first thing one has to consider is the good of the cause. I sacrifice everything to it." And Currita began to weep again, concealing under cover of her fresh tears this very innocent plea: —

"The only thing I ask is, that you yourself will write to the Queen the truth of what is going on. I am so afraid of entanglements, and of the slanders of this Madrid! That Izabel Mazacan has such a tongue. She is so envious of me!"

Butron stood directly in front of her, and said, striking his breast: —

"Confide in me, Curra; I will be responsible!"

At this moment there was a knock at the door; the registration was already finished, and the chief of police begged the Countess's permission to present his excuses.

"Ah! no, no!" exclaimed Currita. "Tell him I can very well dispense with them."

"And add also," said Butron with all the Olympic majesty which his mission there demanded, "that the Countess of Albornoz reserves to herself the right to protest, in all its bearings against such an outrage; and say also that the whole of the Spanish aristocracy, and all sensible and honorable people are at her side to protect her, and defend the sacred cause which she at this moment represents."

Butron said this in an arrogant tone, emphasizing very much the word "cause." He afterwards swept the throng with a lingering glance, as if to say: "Do you understand?" and walked through the crowd, scattering empty words, which curiosity and stupidity filled up with great meaning.

"The business is serious," he said, "and Currita is admirable! A heroine indeed, a Mariana Pineda!"

The old man employed in the accountant's office, Don Pablo Solera, who had been present at the registration, now came in, with his ears very red, and a large document in his hand which he handed to the Countess. Everybody surrounded him, full of curiosity, asking him a thousand questions, which the old employee hastened to answer, half stupefied to see himself before such an illustrious assembly. The registration had been scrupulous to a degree, and had lasted two whole hours. The chief of police had read every letter which fell into his hands, without sparing investigation, had registered all the papers, gone through all the books, and put aside everything in which he thought he detected elements of conspiracy, in order to subject them to the inspection of the Governor of the province. The prudent old man had then exacted of him a receipt signed by the chief of police himself, in which he agreed to return all the papers he took away; and this was the document which Don Pablo presented to the Countess.

"Is there anything important?" asked Butron, in a low voice, reading the list with Currita.

"Psch! nothing," answered the latter. But her eyes fixed themselves with amazement on this part of the long inventory: "A package of twenty-five letters, tied with pink ribbon."

Butron took the floor again. The danger was over, but it was most important that they should derive all the profit possible out of this victory: it was absolutely necessary to make a big outcry, a big protest, and to propagate the scandal in every direction, in order to awaken indignation and excite the feelings of the people against the Government and the intrusive dynasty. In the first place, all the ladies must assemble that afternoon at the Castellana, with graceful Spanish mantillas, and classical shell combs, which was already the signal agreed upon, as a valiant protest; and the following night he, Butron himself, would give a grand ball in Currita's honor, of a purely political character, to which all those present might consider themselves invited.

The ladies must wear in their hair the *fleur-de-lis*, emblem of their hopes, and the gentlemen a blue and white ribbon in the lappels of their coats, the appropriate and suitable colors of the expelled Bourbons.

The enthusiasm was then indescribable; the ladies surrounded the group which Currita and Butron had formed, pushing each other, all chatting at once, and waving their colossal fans, called by the hardly elegant name of *pericones*, in vogue that summer.

"Good! Bravo!" cried Gorito Sardona. "The chorus of the poniards! Butron, it is your turn to bless them!"

And he began to sing the —

"Giusta è la guerra, e in core
Mi parla un santo ardore,"

of Meyerbeer in the *Huguenots*.

This caused general laughter among the ladies, and one after another they began to take their leave, nervous and enthusiastic, mutually confessing that it was most entertaining to conspire, dancing, and displaying *fleur-de-lis*, at the Castellana, and that it was easier than they imagined to overthrow a throne with the wave of a fan.

Meanwhile Villamelon, slipping along behind curtains, doors, and tapestries, saw the illustrious throng file out, without daring to present himself before them. What most annoyed him was that downstairs they had broken two panes of glass in his screen door. Upon seeing herself alone, Currita questioned the old employee, showing him the list: —

"Tell me, Don Pablo, from whom were those twenty-five letters?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he replied. "The chief of police read three or four and put them away with a little laugh that set me thinking."

"But where were they?"

"In the antique little chest which is in your ladyship's cabinet, in a little secret drawer."

"In the secrétaire of the boudoir?" said Currita, still more surprised. "Why, it was empty! Let us see; come with me."

There was, in fact, in a corner of the boudoir, a rare little cabinet, a masterpiece of Italian workmanship of the sixteenth century, of carved ebony with rich incrustations of tortoise-shell, silver, jasper, and bronze. Currita raised the large top-lid, whose golden hinges and locks revealed through their artistic open-work a background of red velvet, and showed the interior of this exquisite piece of furniture, composed of very beautiful little compartments, and of galleries in miniature, in which were interlaced an infinite number of little drawers, hiding one from another by a multitude of secret mechanisms.

"But where were those letters?" asked Currita, impatiently opening one by one the pretty little drawers.

"Here below," answered Don Pablo; and pressing a bronze spring, another secret little drawer sprang out, letting escape, upon opening, a soft odor of dead violets.

Currita put her hand inside, and found in the bottom a faded bunch of those sweet flowers. She looked at it for some time with a certain air of perplexity, as one who tries to remember something, and exclaimed at last, enlightened: "Ah!" Suddenly, becoming very serious, and with the irritated face of one who fears a heavy catastrophe, she murmured very much annoyed:—

"Something must be done! This would be delicious!"

CHAPTER VIII

A PRETTY kettle of fish for the Governor at two o'clock that same afternoon, June 26th. The news of the visit of police to Villamelon's palace had reached the upper spheres of the Government, causing surprise and annoyance. They were ignorant of the cause of this violent measure taken by the Governor, and were still determined to urge upon the Countess of Albornoz the position of first lady-in-waiting, in spite of the comico-dramatic scene which had taken place between herself and his Excellency Martinez the day before. Because, as the reader may have already divined, notwithstanding the plots of the cunning lady, the compromises of the latter with the Government were most real and positive, as the Countess of Mazacan had declared two days before at the Duchess of Bara's house. Currita, profoundly resenting what she believed to be a slight on the part of the abdicated Queen, had decided then and there to go over, bag and baggage, to the enemy's side, satisfying in this way her feminine desire of vengeance, and realizing at the same time her constant desire to make everybody talk, and to take the lead in everything. The new monarch was young and handsome, and once having him within reach, in her post as lady-in-waiting, it seemed easy to her to amalgamate in a short time, in herself, two historical personages for whom she had a great admiration, Mademoiselle de la Vallière and the Princess of the Ursines.

It cost her something, however, to induce Villamelon to second her plans, for the latter, adhering obstinately to what he called his honor, desired to live and die faithful to the fallen dynasty. Currita finally succeeded in conquering him, and, cautious as ever, without taking any responsibility upon herself, charged him to negotiate with Don Juan Antonio Martinez and the minister of Ultramar, both personages whom she had with traitorous foresight succeeded

in attracting some time before to her house, not caring a straw for the aristocratic criticisms of her illustrious friends. The conditions imposed by the Countess were a considerable increase of salary for herself, and the private secretaryship to Don Amadeo for Juanito Velarde, the adored friend who was at that time her confidant.

The commission was easy, considering the anxiety which existed in the Court and in the Government to fill that slighted position with a grandee of Spain. Villamelon, however, committed a *faux pas* against Currita's implicit instructions. The latter had charged him to let a written word under no circumstances appear in the management of the business; and the stupid fellow, in order not to miss an appointment which he had with a certain questionable widow at the very time in which he also had an engagement with the minister, let the unfortunate letter addressed to the latter escape him. This, later on, was the cause of serious complications. Meanwhile, Queen Isabella's letter destroyed the whole affair, and with her unrivalled impudence Currita denied what she had done, leaving the Court and the Government in the lurch and her husband on the horns of a dilemma. Not satisfied with this, and in order to hush up the dangerous rumors circulating about the event, and aroused by Izabel Mazacan, she conceived the idea of denouncing herself to the Governor, writing him an anonymous letter in which, with palpable proofs, she declared that the Countess of Albornoz and the Marquis of Butron were contriving a vast plot, very important papers for the Alfonsist cause being in the former's possession. The unwary Governor fell into the snare, and we have already seen the admirable opportunity which seconded the daring plans of this illustrious impostor, whose paltry intrigues kept the whole Court in commotion. The visit of the police guaranteed forever the fame of her Alfonsist loyalty, giving her an importance in the party which completely put her beyond reach of the pretensions of the Amadist Court. His Excellency Señor Don Juan Antonio Martinez thus understood

it, and in a great rage went to demand an account of the Governor of his stupidity. The latter was alarmed, but taking good care to refrain from confessing that only from an anonymous letter had he obtained the proofs of Currita's conspiracy, declared pompously the certain existence of a vast Alfonsist conspiracy, that the Marquis of Butron directed it, and that the Countess of Albornoz was a disturbing element from head to foot.

"I know that only too well!" exclaimed the Apis ox, gasping from his wound. And he related to the Governor, with all its details, the history of the appointment of first lady-in-waiting and the scene of the letter thrown into the fire, which had already made all his Cabinet companions nearly die with laughter in his very face. The Governor bit his lips, beginning to suspect he had made a mess of it, and the *pas trop de zèle* of Talleyrand flashed into his mind like a reproach. His anger and his fears, however, were checked for a moment by the entrance of the chief of police, who came to deliver to him the papers found in Currita's possession.

The Governor pounced upon them with all the ardor of his wounded *amour propre*, and as bad luck would have it, the first thing that unrolled itself before his eyes was a small sheet of note paper, with the Countess of Albornoz's crest, and written on it, in different styles of hand-writing this strange inscription: "What a handsome animal is man!" The Governor examined the little paper attentively, thinking he discerned some hidden key, or some simple and mysterious sign between these different hand-writings, one chubby and constrained, another large and fine, and the last very diminutive, whose little interlaced flies' feet prolonged themselves in the form of a chain-stitch. These awakened in his mind a vivid recollection; he hurriedly sought the anonymous letter which contained the denunciation, compared the writings of both, and the veil was torn completely from his eyes. They were identical! It was proven that her Excellency the Countess of Albornoz was

a thorough *intrigante*, and his Excellency the Governor of Madrid a first-class idiot. His fury then knew no bounds, and it was increased by the taciturn Martinez, who, with his cheeks puffed out and his mouth stretched with laughter, was bursting to have his say, and finally had it by remarking sarcastically: —

"Conspiracy miscarried! Spain can now sleep tranquilly."

His Excellency experienced a certain malignant delight in not being the only victim of the plots of this tremendous rogue, who was playing practical jokes on the Epaminondas and Aristides of honorable Spain.

The Governor began to swear like any low-born ruffian, and searching and researching the papers, came across the package of twenty-five letters. His joy was now intense, for already his vengeance was assured.

The night before, Currita had made a scrupulous examination of her papers, extracting from them everything that might compromise her, and putting well in sight all that would favor her plans. Needless to say, Queen Isabella's letter was in a very conspicuous place, so that the chief of police could see it at once. Two unpardonable oversights occurred, however. In her portfolio was mislaid the little sheet of paper upon which she had made her caligraphic experiments, and she completely forgot that, in one of the little secret drawers of the antique secretaire of the boudoir, had existed for more than three years a package of letters from a certain Andalusian artillery captain, of grand family, most haughty figure, and very little shame, who had preceded Juanito Velarde in the confidential post which the latter now occupied in her house.

The Governor, triumphant, asked Martinez if he did not think the letters should be published in the newspapers.

"Don't be foolish, man," replied the minister. "Do you imagine there is any one in Madrid, who does not know, or surmise, that those letters exist or have existed?"

"But in that case, what benefit do we derive from them?"

"A very perceptible one. Do you not have to return them to the Countess?"

"Certainly, inasmuch as the chief of police gave a receipt for them."

"Well, then, instead of sending them to the lady, send them to her husband. It is the only way to practise in this affair the work of mercy, of enlightening the ignorant."

"Magnificent!" exclaimed the Governor, astonished at the Machiavellian policy of his Excellency.

And without loss of time he began to write a polite note to the Marquis of Villamelon, begging his pardon a thousand times for the *mauvais quart d'heure* to which he had subjected him that morning, informing him of the restitution of the captured papers, and courteously requesting him to read them over one by one, particularly the twenty-five letters of the package, if only to see if by chance any of them had been mislaid. At this moment a porter delivered to the Governor a small perfumed note, which was to all appearances from some coquettish lady, but proved to be from the handsome Minister Garcia Gomez, the *élégant* of the day and dandy of this eminent progressive cabinet. Informed by his friend Izabel Mazacan of the order of the day given by the Marquis of Butron in Currita's house, he hastened to acquaint the first authority of the province of the display of mantillas and small combs which the ladies of the aristocracy were preparing for that afternoon at the Fuente Castellano. The Governor began to fume again, threatening, between energetic interjections, to do with mantillas and small combs what Esquilache did with capes and hats.

"Don't be foolish, man!" repeated the minister, with his rustic laugh. "This has an easy remedy."

"What?"

"Call Claude Molinos."

Claude Molinos was a consummate vagrant and cheap politician, who at that time cut quite a figure, and was, according to the public voice, the right hand of the Government in all its unlawful doings, and the recruiter and commander-in-

chief of the *Partida de la Porra.* As he entered the room both personages received him as an equal and with great consideration, and after a short conference, he hurriedly took his leave. Martinez also left at the same time, his big head bowed, and his hands and cane behind his back, in a nonchalant attitude, leaving the Governor thoroughly appeased and satisfied, rubbing the not altogether clean nails of his plump little hands against each other.

At half-past six that same afternoon, not a single carriage was to be seen in the Retiro, or in the Park; hundreds of them, on the contrary, were crossing at full trot the Paseo de Recoletas, already crowded with people, and were pursuing their way in a confused bustle towards the Fuente Castellano. Never had Vienna *en route* to the Prater, Berlin to the Linden, or Paris to the Bois, presented a spectacle as original and picturesque as that which at sunset was presented by this immense avalanche of luxurious equipages, the majority of them open, and filled with women of all types and ages, all wearing gay toilets with black or white mantillas and little shell-combs, while flowers were everywhere; in their hair, on their breasts, and in their hands, on the seats and in the windows of the carriages, on the blinders of the horses, and on the liveries of the coachmen. All mingled together without hurrying, and in a most orderly march, carriages, horses, equestrians, harnesses, costumes, and liveries, coachman with their cockades *en évidence*, and footmen with their arms crossed, the jingling of bridles, and cracking of whips, fragrance of spring and of toilet perfumes, odor of earth recently watered, and the scent of lilacs, lilies, and violets. Everything was enveloped as in a haze of fine and brilliant dust, and illuminated with rays of most beautiful light from the reflection of the setting sun, which penetrated through the tops of the trees, making sparks of fire burst from the silver of the harnesses, the buttons of the liveries, and the tires of the wheels.

The wide sidewalks of Calle Alcala were also thronged with a compact multitude of people on foot, making their

way into Recoletas, while one could remark at certain distances groups of mantillas more or less well arranged, and little shell-combs worn on heads more or less graceful. Nevertheless the enthusiasm and shouts of applause did not correspond to the number and the luxury of the multitude. The pedestrians walked with that curiosity, the more eager as it was the more timorous, which a dangerous spectacle always inspires, — the curiosity common to the coward, who expects to hear at every moment the report of fire-arms. The ladies in the carriages on their part exchanged bows, signs, and smiles, without being able to conceal an involuntary trepidation similar to that of the saucy child who determines to commit a prank under the very eyes of the teacher.

Suddenly in the direction of the Treasury the pedestrians stopped, and grouped themselves under the trees, while the carriages slackened their pace, and the coachmen called from right to left to open a road in the middle. Through it advanced at full trot a magnificent Binder victoria, the hood of very fine *chagrin* thrown back, drawn by two fiery dark bay horses, two steppers of great height and powerful trot, which the iron hand of Tom Sickles managed as easily as the wind moved the bunches of lilacs and carnations which the noble brutes wore in their brilliant harnesses. Reclining on the satin cushions with a most distinguished air was the Countess of Albornoz, parading her shamelessness and giving the seat of honor to her friend and relative, the Marchioness of Valdivieso. The two cousins wore between them the national colors, the Countess of Albornoz in a yellow gown with black mantilla, and the Marchioness of Valdivieso in a red gown with white mantilla, both having large tortoise-shell combs, and bunches of red and white carnations in their hair and on their breasts. The people stared upon seeing Currita pass; the ladies waved their handkerchiefs to her from their carriages, many of them throwing her flowers; while a crowd of *élégants* on horseback trotted on either side of the carriage in guise of grooms. In this triumphal manner she made her entrance into the Castellana.

The carriages were already forming there in orderly file, and the Marquis of Butron could then appreciate the full number and importance of his feminine hosts. He was in a victoria of dark livery, with the Marchioness seated at his right, an estimable lady who had one of the most illustrious names in Spain, and could boast one of the most stainless reputations in the Court. Izabel Mazacan and Leopoldina Pastor were in a most exquisite *milord*, while further on were Pilar Balsano, the Duchess of Bara, Carmen Tagle, and a countless number of stars and constellations of the great world, conspicuous among whom was Lopez Moreno's wife with her daughter Lucy. The former, dressed in blue, with a white mantilla and large roses in her hair, almost completely filled a large trap, with adornments *à la calesera*, the coachman and footman having *calañes* hats and trousers, and waistcoats of dark velvet.

All these women, some of them questionable characters, and many others, most of them honorable at bottom but frivolous and superficial in appearance, saluted, in passing, the illustrious fraud. All bowed at her approach, paying her the homage of their smiles and envy, making criminals of themselves by their pernicious condescension to vice, the mortal wound of smart society, contributing with their presence, and their luxury, either from stupidity or weakness or malice, to the great sin of scandal, and to the triumph of the most malicious Court knave who had ever contrived plots.

The deification, however, did not last long. No one has ever been able to explain how it all happened. Some say it came from the Hippodrome; others, from the neighborhood of Salamanca; and others again, from a little hotel which, hidden in a garden, actually exists in the Castellana. The fact is that suddenly in the line of carriages appeared a large victoria *à la Daumont*, drawn by four white horses. Within were two women of the *demi-monde*, grotesquely dressed in red, with pompous mantillas and enormous combs, villanously caricaturing the ladies of the aristocracy. On

the front seat was a ruffian with a tall hat tilted on one side, and long false whiskers, who seemed to parody a certain famous nobleman, at that time holding a conspicuous place in the Alfonsist lines.[1]

This was not a slap in the face, but a violent blow, a deliberate kick, from his Excellency Martinez, who at a stroke finished with combs and mantillas more easily than did Esquilache with hats and capes. It has since been said that, from a window of the hidden little hotel, Martinez witnessed the scene, with his hands behind his back, shaking his big head and laughing his sly, rustic laugh, —

"Ju, Ju, Ju, Ju!"

There was a moment of great confusion, and of real alarm; some men on foot and others on horseback threw themselves on the carriage with raised sticks to make it draw out of the line. The police interfered in favor of the *demi-mondes;* and meanwhile the luxurious equipages fled on the gallop, the men biting their lips with indignation, and the women, full of shame, hiding their amazed faces.

Currita alone remained, sitting erect in her carriage, her light eyes wide open, insulting all these honorable women, whose fault consisted in admitting her to their friendship. In a very innocent tone she said, in order to reassure her cousin: —

"My dear, what has happened? Why are they all going? Because two more women are here? What does it matter?"

CHAPTER IX

The afternoon ministerial newspapers preserved a studied silence in regard to the visit of the police to Villamelon's palace, as if all obeyed the same countersign. The opposition papers, on the contrary, were full of the event, all the head lines of their respective columns launching out into

[1] Historical.

groans or cries of horror, accordingly as they were elegiacally or dithyrambically impelled. No groans, however, were so intense, no cries of horror so rhythmical, as those launched by the pen of the æsthetic Pedro Lopez, in his article "The First Step," which was published that afternoon in the *Fleur-de-lis*. It was evident that Pedro Lopez had chewed lily roots upon giving vent to those sugary sighs, and that he had modulated his cries of horror upon those trills of Stagno, —

"Voi parlate di patria
E patria più non è."

He had doubtless wept over the pink paper tears of eau de cologne, and had in fact, upon grasping the pen in his hand, washed with *pâté agnel*, imagined that he was waving a flag, with a parasol stick for the staff, and a piece of Brussels lace for the banner. When Pedro Lopez rested the sole of his diffident foot in the palace of the Marquis and Marchioness, when he saw profaned by the gross feet of the servants of a bastardly and despotic power those soft carpets which so many times the most noted beauties of the Court had trodden in the rhythmic movements of the dance, a mortal anguish oppressed his heart, a cloud of blood blinded his eyes, and he struck his forehead with a blow from his own fist, without noticing that it resounded hollow. To Pedro Lopez it sounded like a prophetic "Alas!" like a voice sad, far away, mysterious and dim, which murmured in the distance, "The First Step." The first step towards the ninety-three! The first step towards the Terror! Pedro Lopez had seen there, sunk in the most profound affliction, the beautiful Countess of Albornoz, dressed in an elegant *saut du lit*, with *plissé* skirt of foulard silk and cream laces, idyllic as Shakespeare's Ophelia on the borders of the lake, dignified as Schiller's Mary Stuart in the Castle of Fotheringay, sublime as the Princesse Isabelle, sister of Louis XVI., whom posterity called "the Angel of the Guillotine." There had Pedro Lopez seen, and pressed the hand of, that noble

gentleman, the punctilious Marquis of Villamelon, prostrated on a bed of pain like a sick lion, shedding tears of manly affliction at not being able to unsheath in defence of his noble hearth laid low, the glorious sword of a hundred illustrious ancestors. And around these two noble figures, dignified that day by misfortune, and elevated by the mean despotism of a Government to that most glorious pedestal, the pillory of its indignation, Pedro Lopez had seen grouped, more beautiful even, as they were more afflicted, and as elegant in their simple morning négligés as in their superb toilets of other occasions, the handsome Duchesses of A, B, and C; the beautiful Marchionesses of D, E, and F; the enchanting Countesses of G, H, and I; the charming Viscountesses of J, K, and L; the most attractive Baronesses of M, N, and N; and the delightful Señoras and Señoritas of O, P, and Q. The stern sex was also worthily represented by the venerable Marquis of Butron, most polished of gentlemen; and by the Dukes, Marquises, Counts, Viscounts, Barons, and Señores So-and-so, and by many other notable persons, who in the intensity of his emotion, perhaps, Pedro Lopez had involuntarily forgotten to mention. "The First Step!" All heads seem to bow beneath the weight of the same frightful thought. But up spoke the illustrious Marquis of Butron, and the echo of his magic words raised the noble heads, and one saw there illustrious Vendeans, ready to dispute the ground step by step; Garridas, Marfisas, and Bradamants capable of realizing with the lustre of their eyes the feats of those heroic amazons of the first crusades.

Here Pedro Lopez put four lines of little exclamation points, and immediately added: —

"We listened to his words, and a ray of celestial hope shot through our breasts."

More exclamation points.

"The villanous attempt of the Governor of Madrid has been the first step taken towards the Terror. But — let us hope again! Already —

"'The Castilian lion
Shakes his mane.'"

And, on the next line: —

"It is needless to say that the proverbial hospitality of the Marquis and Marchioness of Villamelon served to the illustrious throng a delicious improvised lunch, at which the attention of everybody was attracted by the delicate orange sorbets, served in the skin of the fruit itself, which, notwithstanding the inappropriateness of the hour, the heat of the day made delicious. We congratulate the Marquis and Marchioness of Villamelon for having introduced this elegant novelty, which will doubtless be speedily adopted in the dining-rooms and drawing-rooms of the Court."

All these, and many other absurdities on the same order, Currita read with delighted avidity, looking with disdain from the height of her triumph upon Metternich and Pitt, upon Bismarck and Cavour.

It seemed very natural to her that they should call her Ophelia, Mary Stuart, and Angel of the Guillotine. She laughed within herself to see her husband transformed into a sick lion and punctilious gentleman, but allowed it to pass without contradiction, for she knew very well that no one mounts to-day to the temple of fame, unless with wings made of newspaper clippings.

To crown her satisfaction, the director of a certain famous review then called, presenting her a card from the Marquis of Butron, who strongly recommended him to her. With great deference and volubility he manifested his desire to publish in the review the photograph of the heroic Countess, and also some engravings of the existing state of things, relating to the event that all Madrid was discussing. She received him with that amiable condescension common to great ladies, towards any scamp who flatters them, and at once conceded his petition, it being agreed that the review would publish the photograph of the Countess dressed in the costume she would wear that afternoon at the display of mantillas and small combs at the Castellana, and two other

commemorative engravings, one representing the façade of the palace in the act of being invaded by the police, and the other the moment in which, with valiant presence of mind, Currita went out to meet the invaders.

"It would be convenient," said the journalist, "to have some photographs of the locality, to serve as a guide to the artist, that he might note well the details."

"Certainly," replied Currita, much pleased. "The Marquis is very apt in the art, and will be glad to take them for you himself."

And without loss of time she sent a message to Fernandito, requesting him to come at once to the salon in which they were. The servant soon brought the answer: "The Marquis had ordered the victoria at four o'clock, and had not yet returned home."

Fernandito in fact was at that moment very much harassed by a mysterious doubt which he was anxious to solve. With very great uneasiness he had received the Governor's courteous note, but, quite tranquil after having read it, he began curiously to inspect the returned papers. He read the first of the twenty-five letters without understanding it; in the second he stumbled across this sentence, written in the hand-writing of the artilleryman: —

"As far as your husband is concerned, it would be well if we suppress the *Villa*, and leave him the *melon;* it is proven that the poor man belongs to the Cucurbitaceous family."

Fernandito did not read any more; with his mouth and eyes wide open, he sat for a long time in suspense. Then rising suddenly and entering his dressing-room, he seized a stick with a silver knob, a slender bamboo cane, knotty and flexible, which cut the air like the hisses of a serpent as Villamelon in a great rage went hurriedly to the rooms of the spirituelle Currita, the weeping Ophelia and pathetic Mary Stuart, who was threatened with an immoderate whipping, instead of the poetical lake or the dramatic chopping-block.

God did not wish, however, that such an ideal creature

should come to such a prosaic end. Midway in a large corridor, adorned with exotic plants, cages filled with rare birds, and curiosities of all descriptions, the large Kamschatka dog ran to meet Villamelon, wagging his tail affectionately. The Marquis looked at him a moment face to face, and suddenly, as if in his ears resounded those accents of Othello, —

" . . . a compir la vendetta
Il ciel me invita," —

he discharged on the head of the dog the immoderate blow which without doubt he had reserved for the poetic Ophelia. Presently, like the drunkard who, inspired with a longing from the first glass, does not stop until he exhausts the bottle, he began to shower upon the ribs of the animal a hail-storm of blows and deluge of beatings, the equal of which had never been registered in the canine annals of the frozen peninsula of Kamschatka. Panting and perspiring, he returned to his room, undressed himself hurriedly, and went to bed.

" Morro, ma vendicato
Se dopo lei morro ! . . . "

Ten minutes afterwards he got up again and ordered the victoria; he went straight to Fornos, afterwards to the Casino, and then to the Veloz Club, and receiving on all sides congratulations and queries concerning the event which all Madrid was discussing, he whispered with great reserve and dissimulation, in the ears of as many prudent friends as he met, a certain mysterious question. Some shrugged their shoulders, others burst out laughing; all answered him no, but Villamelon still pursued his enigmatical quest. At last, in a little private room of the Veloz Club, he met an old man with large white whiskers and a head of very thick white hair, more worthy to crown the head of King Lear than that red and pimply countenance, in which every vice had left its imprint. His indisputable air of *grand sei-*

gneur contrasted singularly with his abandoned and almost dirty toilet, and gave him all the appearance of an ancient monarch disguised as a shop-keeper. He was seated before a large bottle of gin, which he despatched little by little from an immense crystal goblet, throwing in from time to time some lumps of sugar. His name was Pedro de Vivar; he was the second son of a grand family, lived by gambling when he was not intoxicated, and made himself famous in Madrid by his cynicism and scurrilous stories, everybody knowing him by the name of Diogenes. He had reached the point of being an original, and once in possession of this title, could commit with ease all sorts of irregularities, without having any other fear than that of observing people shrug their shoulders, murmuring: —

"Absurdities of Diogenes."

He knew this very well, and took advantage of it to say the most shocking things to everybody, with the home-thrusts that his sagacious understanding and his great worldly experience always prompted. He was a walking plaster who raised blisters wherever he went. The innocent Villamelon engrossed with his idea approached him, and after some insignificant words which gave Diogenes time to empty his glass twice, he finally exploded the mysterious question, looking carefully in all directions: —

"Friend Diogenes, you who know everybody, can you tell me who are the Cucurbitaceous family?"

Diogenes looked at him for a moment from head to foot, doubtless reflecting that one more readily recognizes the foolishness or the talent of a man by his questions than by his answers, and finally said: —

"I should think so! Come here!" And conducting him before a mirror, and grasping him with one hand by the neck, with the other he gave him a sound slap on the head, adding very seriously, "Here you are to a T;" immediately afterwards shrieking imprudently in his ear: —

"No se envanezca de su ilustre raza,
Quien debia ser melón y es calabaza."

"No one should boast of his illustrious race,
Who should be a melon, and is only a squash."

The following day the ministerial morning papers broke at last the studied reserve they had imposed upon themselves, and one of them, *La España con honra*, published a small extra, in which one could discern Martinez's fist lifting the corner of the veil which hid the event, with that tacit refinement of malice which, without the necessity of naming, indicates by pointing with the finger.

"Yesterday," said the paper, "the visit of the police to the palace of the Marquis and Marchioness of Villamelon, previously authorized by the judge and ordered by the Governor, according to the prescriptions of the existing laws, was the subject of a great many comments in all the papers. By a lamentable piece of imprudence on the part of the chief of police, among the political papers captured in the apartments of the Marchioness were included some important letters of a purely domestic character. The Governor cavalierly returned these papers, without delay, to the Marquis of Villamelon, comprehending that in conjugal affairs it is the business of the husband alone to remonstrate. We believe, however, that the incident will not be followed by any serious consequences, taking into consideration the proverbial prudence of the interested parties."

Another ministerial paper, *El puente de Alcolea*, perfected this news with the following announcement, in which this time, not the fist, but the hoof of his Excellency Martinez appeared, delivering a kick worthy of the formidable hoof of the legitimate Apis ox: —

"It is entirely without foundation that the registration effected by the police in the Marquis of Villamelon's palace was without result. The Governor did not err in the scent, but was only mistaken in the game, for instead of a hare, a deer sprang forth."

And further on, describing the concourse of illustrious personages who had hastened to Villamelon's palace, at that critical time, —

"To the great amazement of all, the Marquis of Butron also arrived hurriedly on the scene, with his budding beard completely white, which ordinarily is as black as a crow's wings. It is not possible that the feelings or the surprise of the Marquis were so intense as to turn his beard suddenly white. We should more readily believe that he had that morning forgotten the chemical secrets of his toilet, doubtless from not having had in mind the following anecdote which we suggest to him.

"It is related of Charles V. that once, when visiting a certain monastery in Germany, he saw a monk with a black beard and his head completely white. He asked him the cause of such a strange phenomenon, and the monk answered: —

"'Sire, I have worked more with my brains than with my teeth.'

"Some months afterwards a Polish ambassador, who had black hair and a white beard, presented himself to the Cæsar. Charles then remembered the answer of the friar, and said to his courtiers: —

"'Here is an ambassador who has worked more with his teeth than his brains.'

"Let the illustrious diplomat be more cautious in the future if he does not wish people to make about himself the remark which Charles V. made about the Polish ambassador."

Villamelon and Currita each read, on their own account, all this news, but took pretty good care not to communicate to each other their impressions; it appearing to her more prudent to play innocent, and to him easier to pretend not to understand. The Marquis, for his part, had already vented the distress of his heart on the yellow Kamschatka dog; and Currita also hastened to alleviate her distress in the delicate friendship of Juanito Velarde, who came to her

very much alarmed, to ask categorical explanations of the event. The date alone of the letters sufficed to tranquillize him completely, and this faithful friend then took it upon himself to lessen the breach between the two, and to throw trifles to the winds, whispering first to the husband and then to the wife the remark of the goose in the fable: —

"Peace, gentlemen, peace!"

To this they both agreed without any very great reluctance, and that night they all three dined together *en famille*, in order to go afterwards to the Marquis of Butron's house, where Currita wished to present her friend and protector, Juanito Velarde.

Meanwhile the articles of the *España con honra* and *El puente de Alcolea* flew through all Madrid in the whistlings, scoffings, and sarcastic remarks of Trojans and Tyrians, and of Capulets and Montagues. Strange, indeed, that those who criticised with most eagerness, and who ran with most satisfaction from place to place commenting upon the news, were the men and women who, the evening before, had paid homage to Currita at the Castellana as to a queen, and who hastened to honor her in the same manner this very night at the Marquis of Butron's ball; which only proves that in certain societies envy takes away with one hand what adulation gives with the other, not comprehending that the more they expose the deformity of the idol they adore, the more disgusting and repugnant is the homage they render to it.

At eleven o'clock the heat and the throng of people made a sojourn quite insupportable, and a passage impossible through the drawing-rooms of the Marquis of Butron. All the doors and windows of the house were thrown wide open, and the more than ordinary concourse of people appeared like a confused jumble of jewels, feathers, flowers, exquisite gowns, and half-nude women, among whom the men stood out like black spots, revolving around them, suffocating and perspiring like a swarm of black worms engendered by this compact mass of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In the room nearest the vestibule, the Marquis and the Mar-

chioness of Butron received their guests, seeing pass before them, with the same amiable smile, great names and great shames, perfect innocence and refined malice, honor without blemish and scandalous reputations, jumbled and mixed together in this house without a single noble or honorable protest against the shameless and funereal tolerance of smart modern societies.

At a quarter of twelve the Countess of Albornoz arrived, imposing upon everybody her shamelessness and cynicism, making mud in the mire, according to the energetic expression of an ancient historian. She came in, leaning upon the arm of Juanito Velarde, and her husband brought up the rear. The Marquis and Marchioness of Butron advanced to meet them, and while Fernandito presented to them the adored friend, Currita said, with her enchanting, timid little child-voice: —

"He is a rascal, Butron, a rascal! I won't say he is a convert; but he is a catechumen who to-day for the first time wears our colors."

And with her feather fan she pointed out to the faithful partisan of the Bourbons the little blue and white knot of ribbon which, now that the private secretaryship to Don Amadeo had been discarded, appeared also in the dress coat of Juanito Velarde. Butron pressed the hand of the latter, murmuring some courteous sentences, and Currita, poking her head between the two with the most infantile sauciness in the world, said very low, almost jumping for joy, with the puerile vainglory of the child who catches a little gold-fish in a fountain: —

"A conquest of mine, Butron, a conquest of mine! You see how much the party is indebted to me."

Meanwhile Currita's arrival had produced a general and uniform murmur, in which the low jests and knowing winks exchanged by the grooms in the vestibule fraternized with the affected and icy observations which the elegant women who filled the drawing-rooms whispered to each other. No one, however, failed to press and squeeze forward in order

to shake the hand of the heroine of the day, and to obtain, if it were only at a distance, some of the smiles from her lips which she was distributing to right and left. They then danced in her honor a sort of court quadrille, in which the most illustrious women and the most noted men present took part. Butron danced with Currita; the Marchioness with Fernandito; Juanito Velarde, as introduced by the heroine, with the Duchess of Astorga, one of the most sensible and honorable women who figured in the Court. The crowd increased around the quadrille, — the pride of all those who thought they should by rights have taken part in it beginning to rise in rebellion. The heat had increased with the influx of new arrivals, and a great many women had taken refuge in a lower drawing-room, which led out into a little garden, also crowded with people, and beautifully illuminated with Venetian lanterns. Various grooms, with powdered wigs and full livery of green and yellow, the colors of the house, went about everywhere, offering to the guests, on huge silver waiters, *sorbets à la Albornoz*. They were the famous orange ices, served in the skin of the fruit artistically emptied for the purpose. Currita, aided by Butron's butler, had reached the Herculean Pillars of feminine celebrity.

"Magnificent!" exclaimed the Duchess of Bara, taking one. "The thought is appropriate — Curra symbolized by a sorbet. Her freshness could not be better represented. Is it not so, Diogenes?"

Diogenes hastened forward, limping, and sank into a chair.

"I am ill," he said.

"What 's the matter with you?"

"What is the matter with him?" said Carmen Tagle. "He has what the poppies have, — poison!"

Diogenes blurted out something atrocious, accompanied by his favorite interjection, which he always used among ladies as a substitute for something more energetic, — "Polaina!" At his afternoon collation in San Antonio he

had eaten some cucumber salad, which he had not very well digested. The ladies laughed heartily, intoning the well known tautology, "What an original!" and Carmen Tagle, to relieve him, offered him a sorbet, saying: —

"Come, man, take a *Curra Albornoz* and you will recover. Cucumber salad is not more indigestible than the article in *El puente de Alcolea*, and there you see the Countess of Albornoz dancing away as unconcerned as you please."

"Yes, she is altogether too much so," said an old, fat, shrivelled-up lady, dolefully, who peered forth between her satins and laces like a sugar-sweet in its lace paper.

"I never thought she would have the courage to present herself here to-night," observed another.

"Bah! Her effrontery dares that and much more."

"Her effrontery?" questioned Diogenes. "Why?"

"Why? You would be capable of defending her, I suppose!"

"Well, I should think I would defend her. Her effrontery! Your effrontery justifies hers! If you receive her, why should she not present herself?"

"Just listen!" exclaimed, greatly shocked, the Marchioness of Lebrija, president-general of three pious associations. "I should like you to tell us what one is to do, then, in Madrid with that class of persons."

Diogenes looked at her from head to foot, and with the precocious impudence of his tavern language, and inexorable logic of his profound good-sense, answered at last: —

"Lock and bolt your doors, or don't complain, my lady! *Polaina!* if you raise the top of the drain, what right have you to complain afterwards if there is a bad odor?"

CHAPTER X

It has been said that hypocrisy is a homage that vice pays to virtue, and it is equally true that a false idea of honor is a deference that knaves pay to honest men, disciples of true honor. The latter is a human child of the divine morality of the gospel, the former a conventional theory dictated by the convenient morals of knaves and fools; the latter defends, like a cuirass of brilliant steel, the purity of the soul and the rectitude of the conscience, while the former pretends to defend with Bayard's visor the great social system of conventionalism, invested with all human miseries and follies.

According to the former, honor must never be lost, and the liar becomes justly offended because he is accused of prevarication; the thief demands satisfaction from the one who accuses him of theft; and the criminal, who drags a chain, can call out upon the field of honor the judge who imposes it upon him. So that the blood which stains the conscience cleanses the honor, and men who have never known shame are called upon to decide cases of honor, — *Eacos*, *Ninas*, and *Radamants*, brainless or malicious, who only from deficiencies of the Code wear no chain other than that attached to the watch in their waistcoat pockets. The Countess of Albornoz, according to this, had likewise her little code of honor, and the article in the *España con honra* had profoundly wounded it.

There are persons who suffer a sort of moral crookedness of sight, which makes them see nothing where there is a great deal, and a great deal where nothing exists. Villamelon did not see anything which affected him in the registration of police, except the two broken panes of glass in the screen door; and he gave orders that they should never be replaced, recollecting that Wellington never restored those in his house broken by the London populace, when

the latter one day forgot Waterloo. All the rest he cast aside into the pile of annoying bagatelles, the trifles of a corrupt and ceremonious society, dubbed with the worn-out title of *Byzantine questions*, unworthy of occupying the attention of a serious man. Currita, for her part, did not see anything at which to take offence in what was said in the papers concerning her person, except that brief sentence in the *España con honra*, "We believe, however, that the incident will not be followed by any serious consequences, taking into consideration the proverbial prudence of the interested parties." Currita had placed her reputation, as woman of the world, under the protection of Bayard's false code of honor, and this stung her to the quick, directly wounding her honor, signifying, as in substance it did signify, that she was a *Jimena* with no *Cid* to defend her, — an atrocious insult, an unpardonable offence made to a lady who excelled in celebrity all the bull-fighters, mountebanks, industrious fleas, and wise monkeys who had up to date attained fame at the Court.

"We'll see!" said the haughty Countess; and she at once appointed her good friend Juanito Velarde as the paladin of her cause.

A long tête-à-tête interview took place between them, which lasted until the night was far advanced, and Currita, upon bidding him good-bye at the door of the boudoir, said in her spoilt, childish fashion: —

"So it is agreed that I will order the breakfast at Fornos, and that there will be *écrevisses à la Bordelaise.*"

Velarde made a wry face, which looked like a smile, and walked away; at the door he stopped and looked back. She then made another affectionate sign of farewell, and he went out at length slowly, and very much preoccupied, as if he was being dragged away by force. The night was very beautiful, and Velarde followed on foot the puzzling streets which led from Villamelon's palace, at every step stumbling across the humble neighbors of the garrets and cellars, who were taking the fresh air seated on the side-

walks. He soon reached the *Plaza de Oriente*, took two turns around the circular garden, and finally seated himself upon a bench facing the palace.

From the main entrance a jet of brilliant light shone forth, which cut with a large rectangle the black shadows of the pavement. By its reflection one could distinguish the armed sentinels at the doors of their sentry-boxes. The day being Sunday the gardens were crowded with people of the lower classes, soldiers and servants, either seated or promenading. Several groups of belated children ran here and there with great shouts of glee, laughing with that spontaneous and communicative joy of childhood which recalls the joy of the birds at the dawn of day. A ring of children were dancing around at Velarde's very side, singing in measured tones: —

"Luna, lunera,
Cascabelera,
Dame dos cuartos
Para pajuela."

He, oblivious of everything, with his elbows resting on his knees, drew capricious figures in the sand with his elegant walking-stick with malachite knob. At dawn the following day, he had to fight the director of the *España con honra*. This is what Currita had exacted of him, covetous always of a sensation, and confounding the voice of celebrity with the cries of scandal, believing that this duel would place the only pearl wanting in the crown won in her last skirmish. In vain Velarde represented to her the great ridicule which this duel would bring upon Villamelon, upon herself, and upon him. Currita had already arranged her programme, and her restless spirit, always led on by a thousand objects which attracted without satisfying it, had fixed upon this duel, which it was anxious to see realized, with that expansive force of compressed vapor which characterizes the desires in souls of energetic temperament.

Was it her fault that Villamelon was a Juan Lanas? Was she going to allow any newspaper whatsoever to laugh at her isolation? Would he, her only friend, the man in whom she had placed her friendship and confidence, be capable of abandoning her in this predicament? And for that matter their fates were united, and it was necessary for them to speak out as soon as possible to all these people: on her account, so they would understand once for all that she knew how to make herself respected; and on his account, because he was young and beginning his career in the world, and no step was more fitting, no beginning more opportune for launching into that path bristling with dangers, than breaking a journalist's head; as not in vain has it been said: —

> "En aquesta Salvaje y fiera liza
> Lleva mas razon quien mas atiza."

Moreover, she demanded no catastrophe, no duel to the death. She would content herself with a little sensation, a sham duel like so many others: fire a couple of shots, and afterwards breakfast at Fornos. She would order the breakfast, and would not fail to have *écrevisses à la Bordelaise* which on his sporting days was Juanito Velarde's favorite dish. Could any attention possibly be more exquisite? And was there anything particularly strange in all this?

"Nothing, absolutely nothing!" thought the paladin, tracing hieroglyphics in the sand; but before the prospect of the duel, before the idea of firing a couple of shots, he seemed to hear already the report of fire-arms, and at this sinister echo the phantom of the first crime surged into his mind. That of death came afterwards, and lastly that of hell, where there is no repose, no peace, no rest, no hope, only eternal hatred, eternal weeping, eternal gnashing of teeth! Velarde wanted to laugh at this idea, which he had heard so many times called the scarecrow of old women and children, but the Voltairean laugh would not then come

to his lips; he laughed, yes, but he felt at the same time in the roots of his hair, a sort of oppressive cold chill. For this man was not vicious; he was a poor boy full of illusions, and the life of the great world had gone to his head, as a wine of much body goes to the head of one whose stomach is only accustomed to water. Upon arriving in Madrid from his province, bringing for all patrimony something similar to that which the ancient statute-laws of Viscaya assigned to the second sons of great houses, — a family tree, a roof-tile, and a suit of armor, — he found himself suddenly in the midst of this brilliant world, whose doors yielded to his illustrious name; and it seemed to him then, as to Galo in Rome, that beyond this assemblage of gods and goddesses there was nothing more to be desired. He then wished to occupy among them a place in his own right, and chance and his handsome figure offered him to Currita, who was then in search of a confidant, to whom she was pleased to give in her house the post of Medor. This gave Velarde great importance, and tied to Currita's skirts and Villamelon's coat-tails, he was introduced into all the salons of the Court, meanwhile preparing himself to enter upon some brilliant career in that royal palace opposite him; his vanity and idle character preferring the pompous life of the courtier to the active life of the politician. Currita had promised constantly to aid him, and, the night before, the Marquis of Butron had also promised to help him, — the astute old man who swept all within in times of misfortune, until the hour should come to sweep without, which would assuredly be the hour of triumph.

Velarde ceased gazing at the ground in order to gaze at the palace in front of him, the dwelling-place of the monarch whose private secretary he had been upon the point of becoming. How tiresome to have to wait all over again and lose so much time! For it was quite necessary that this monarch should go, and the other should come; and yet, who could tell? Perhaps one of those little shots they were going to fire, would knock down the card house which Cur-

rita and Butron were helping him to build. Suddenly his reflections were interrupted by a harsh juvenile voice resounding at his side, and modulating between its discordant notes all the delicate tones of affection and tenderness.

"What are you about, mother?" it said. "You are not taking anything!"

Velarde looked around and saw a drinking-fountain behind him; seated at a little iron table was a lad who seemed to be a workman, and an old woman who was no doubt his mother. A glass of frozen orgeat was between the two, from which both were eating with two spoons, he swallowing his share with avidity, and she, looking at him with a placid smile, scarcely moistening her spoon, as if she left him to enjoy the refreshment to his heart's content, it being sufficient for her to enjoy the immense happiness of this her darling son's treat.

Velarde at once understood all that this meant, and the immense value of this happiness bought for eight coppers. A wave of dormant affection and sentiment arose in his heart, bringing suddenly before him all the past, with the bitterness of the good lost through his own fault, and the poetry with which memory is clothed in the minds of youth, recalling a vague crowd of beloved shadows, which all distant epochs awaken in the imagination. In the centre was his mother, whose first-born he was, and surrounding her his little brothers and sisters, all crying as he had left them three years before upon embracing them for the last time. She had then strained him to her heart with rapture and fervor, as if wishing to imprint upon his heart the depth of her love for him, or to engrave in her own his image so beloved. Her forehead already wrinkled rested upon his shoulder and her trembling lips whispered in his ear: —

"Juan, my son! Be a good Christian and pray to Our Lady of Regla! Remember your father, who died like a saint! I tell you, my son, and I know what I am saying, that one cannot die well who does not live like a Christian!"

And when, later on towards morning, occupied with the

thought of his journey he was closing up the valises in his room, he heard in the silence of the night the key turn in the lock of his door. He immediately opened it, and found his mother half-dressed and in her stocking-feet; she had come cautiously on tip-toe to look through the key-hole.

"What does this mean, mother? Is there anything the matter?"

"No, my boy, nothing; there is nothing the matter. I only wanted to see you again, child of my heart. To-morrow you are going away!"

And she whispered to him again, weeping with the energy of faith, which offers a sure consolation, and the anguish of the love which clings to a hope.

"Pray to Our Lady of Regla, Juan! Always be a good Christian, my darling boy!"

Velarde felt ashamed of himself, and the mysterious wave mounted from his heart to his eyes, making him weep with his head between his hands, sobbing bitterly with more weakness than a woman, and more dread than a child. His mother, yes, she adored him! She would not advise him to fight a duel, offending God, — placing himself before a revolver, running the risk of losing his life, the risk of losing his soul! And three years had passed without his seeing her! She was so far away, the saintly old lady, while he, ungrateful and perverse, had allowed nearly two months to pass without writing a single word to the poor old woman. Velarde felt the necessity of writing her at once and of giving vent in a letter to that affection, that anguish, and those tears which consumed him. With long strides he took the road that led to his house, going over in his mind what he would say to her, patching up a letter full of affection, of protests, of endearing hopes, and of all he knew would most please her. She always praised his witty sayings so much. How she had laughed, twenty years ago, when, as she explained to him one day the catechism, he was amazed that there were only three enemies of the soul! "No more?" he said very much astonished, and his mother

laughed, how she laughed! Ah! in what a different manner he laughed twenty years later in the midst of his tears! Alas! he was only six years old then, and it was necessary that twenty more years should elapse in order to make him understand that in fact there were only three, and that those three were enough and more than enough. In the middle of Calle del Arenal a boy began to follow him, trying to sell him the tenth of a lottery ticket.

"To-morrow they draw!" he cried.

Velarde impatiently repulsed him twice, giving him the last time a blow with his cane; but suddenly changing his mind he turned back and bought not only a tenth, but the whole of the ticket. If that ticket should draw a prize, how many things would he not do! And thinking about it and making calculations Velarde finally reached the Calle del Príncipe, where he lived; he asked for lights and shut himself up in his room. In a drawer of his desk, in a little frame, was an engraving of Our Lady of Regla, which his mother had given him upon the day of his departure. He stood it up before him against the inkstand and began to write, two hours being thus employed. He was very well satisfied, his affairs were going on very well, and the Restoration was a sure thing. The Countess of Albornoz —

"Ah! no, no, no." It was impossible to mention that name in this letter! So he blotted it out, with precise and effective blottings that it might not be deciphered, and wrote in its place the Marquis of Butron. The Marquis of Butron had assured him that it would take place in less than a year, and had then promised him a very brilliant future. This would be the time to think of the future of the boys. Henry and Peter could come to him in Madrid, and little Louis, the baby, her pet child and heart's delight, could remain there with her until he graduated as Bachelor of Arts. But about this they would speak later, for he was thinking — ah! he was thinking — Had she not guessed what? Did her heart not tell her? Well, then, he was thinking of spending the month of August with them all, remaining until September 8th,

when he would make with the family the *novena* to Our Lady of Regla. Presently came questions without end, afterwards messages without number, and at last the great *coup* which would make the heart of his poor old mother bound with joy and consolation. On the third of July, the anniversary of his father's death, he was going to confession and communion, in order to solemnize as much as possible that sad day.

And he wrote as he thought, the poor unfortunate, at the same time begging of Our Lady of Regla to spare him from this duel which he was going to fight the following morning; for it was quite evident that his honor was compromised, the business decided upon, and the sin committed, which it was now impossible to retract. He himself then mailed the letter, and at two o'clock lay down without undressing altogether, in order to rest until dawn.

The fatigue of the preceding night, passed at the Marquis of Butron's ball, soon overcame him, and he slept at last, thinking of his mother, who was leading him by the hand as when a child to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Regla, erected on a large cliff overlooking the sea, which melted on the horizon into the sky, as if it were impossible to present two distinct images of the infinite, and returning afterwards, always proud and constant, to break against the rocks of the coast, roaring like desperation eternal and impotent. At four o'clock Velarde awoke terrified, for his servant shook him suddenly by the arm. Two gentlemen had arrived in a carriage, and were amazed, and could not believe he was still sleeping. He dressed hurriedly, went downstairs aghast and perturbed, with them entered the carriage, which began to roll away without his noticing what they were talking about, or what they were saying to him, or the road they took; nor did anything form itself in his mind except the placard of a bull-fight stuck on the corner of Alcañice's house, and a policeman with large white side-whiskers like those of Diogenes, who as they passed opened the gate of the Retiro. Why did that man have side-whiskers and no beard? This preoccupied him a moment, and he thought of it an hour

afterwards, when the carriage stopped at the entrance of an immense poplar grove, formed of most luxuriant trees, in which thousands and thousands of birds were singing in all tones the wonders of God. Here there was a little man with scanty side-whiskers and gold spectacles, as pale as himself and as terrified and trembling, while two other very serious gentlemen accompanied him. It seemed to Velarde that they spoke among themselves and measured the ground, gave a pistol to himself and one to the little man, placing them both face to face. Immediately afterwards there was a clapping of hands, and then a shot. Velarde gave a sudden spring and a horrible cry, and trees, mountains, earth and firmament turned swiftly around falling upon him as if to crush him. Afterwards a cloud of blood blinded him, then another black cloud enveloped him, and afterwards nothing — he saw nothing more on earth. He saw only Christ on high, alive and terrible, who advanced to judge him, and beyond Him eternity, obscure, immense, and implacable.

CHAPTER XI

The news of Velarde's death reached Madrid almost immediately, and the Countess of Mazacan was the first to present herself at Currita's house, with the mischievous intention of telling her the sad news. Currita changed color vividly, and for a moment it seemed as if the entire world had fallen upon her.

"In Madrid this has made a horrible impression," said the Countess of Mazacan, very pointedly; "everybody is speaking of his poor mother; he was her only support."

Currita understood the terrible reproach which this observation conveyed. Without taking time to reflect, but converting into anger against every one else her own remorse, a common failing with all selfish people, she forgot her delicacy and meekness, and turned upon the Countess of

Mazacan furiously, like a cat whose tail has been trodden upon. In the impetuosity of her anger, she committed the imprudence of excusing herself.

"How does that concern me?" she cried. "Do you suppose that I asked him to fight? Who told him to put on a shirt eleven yards long? The character of Don Quixote also has its weaknesses, my dear."

"And so has that of Dulcinea del Toboso," replied the Countess of Mazacan, beginning to bristle.

"Of course it has, especially when it is provoked by — I know what."

"And that is?"

"Envy, dear, envy."

"Envy? Whose?"

"Yours, for instance."

The Countess of Mazacan in her turn gave a spring like a cat, because the shot struck home.

"Mine?" she cried. "I envious of you! Of the Villamelon! Of the Vi—lla—me—lo—na!"

And she burst out laughing, with a laugh full of feminine spite, long since stored up, while she emphasized the syllables of that "Vi—lla—me—lo—na," which was by a strange anomaly the greatest insult which could be given to Currita.

There then ensued between the spirituelle Ophelia and Diana the huntress a dispute worthy of Pedro Lopez for chronicler. They fought like two street venders, flinging in each other's faces truths and calumnies, handfuls of mud kneaded in *eau de cologne*, with the impudence and malevolence of two Marfisas or Bradamantes of the lower classes, ready to grasp each other by the hair of the head, and roll upon the soft carpet, as they once rolled in the middle of the stream. The Countess of Mazacan had split her gloves in clenching her fists, and shrieked out with her beautiful soprano voice. The other, inflexible in her seat, with head erect like that of a viper which defends itself, spat out her impertinences without moving, looking neither to right nor left, like a small statue of petrified anger. In the midst of

the dispute Izabel Mazacan alluded to the letters of the artillery officer, and this remark recalled something to Currita's mind which seemed to give her a great fright. She rushed out of the room very hurriedly, leaving her rival with the insult upon her lips, and ran in search of Kate, her maid. Juanito Velarde must have a number of her letters, and it was necessary to get them back again without loss of time, before they fell into any one's else hands, and before another catastrophe could happen like that not long since. Kate quickly got into a cab, and an hour afterwards delivered all the letters into her mistress's hands, among them, by mistake, being the lottery ticket which Juanito Velarde had bought the night before upon leaving her house. Strange mockery of fate! That ticket had drawn a prize of fifteen thousand dollars, which, after carefully arranging her plans, the Countess of Albornoz hastened secretly to collect.

All Madrid began to file once more through Currita's house condoling with her, through one of those satires of which the Court offers frequent examples. "She was past suffering; but had deeply felt the death of that poor boy, so congenial and so affectionate, attached like a dog to Fernandito and herself. The blow had been terrible, and the consequences to herself very bad; for she knew nothing, absolutely nothing. Of course not! The poor boy had taken very good care not to say a word to Fernandito and herself, understanding that, from delicacy, they would at once have prevented him committing such a blunder. For, after all, it had been a good-intentioned piece of impertinence, one of those proofs of friendship which excite comment in spite of their heroism, and even offend decorum, besides resulting in other very serious consequences, which to them were quite annoying." Here Currita lowered her voice, whispering with the greatest secrecy to those men and women who enjoyed the reputation of being the most renowned professional charlatans of the Court: —

"Just fancy, these poor people have no fortune, and his mother is reduced to misery. I do not know her; and of

course it is a delicate question. But Fernandito and I have made a sacrifice and have already deposited in the Bank of Spain fifteen thousand dollars, so that the unfortunate woman may draw the income." It was quite true; Currita had deposited in the Bank of Spain the fifteen thousand dollars won in the lottery by Velarde, and immediately afterwards had written a letter to his mother condoling with her for the heroic death of her son, and lamenting the duel into which his excessive gallantry had led him. She afterwards added, in a postscript not exempt from cleverness or fictitious delicacy, that the circumstances of her position being known to her husband and herself, they both wished to prove the intimate friendship which had united them to her son Juanito, by offering her an income and a capital, which were deposited in the Bank of Spain, and the papers concerning which she sent enclosed. This letter once finished, Currita shrugged her shoulders and was as unconcerned as ever.

Meanwhile, no one thought to prepare that poor mother for the terrible blow which threatened her, and she, happy with Juanito's letter, with the exaggerated prevision of affection, which delights in framing necessities which do not exist for the sole pleasure of supplying them, began to prepare the apartments of that beloved son, who, notwithstanding his ingratitude and his defects, was to her at that moment the most perfect model of filial love. There is nothing more disposed to pardon than the heart of a mother; nothing like absence to blot from one's memory the defects of loved ones, putting forward only their good points and the moments of happiness due to their affection.

So she entered those apartments closed three years before, the sanctuary of her maternal love, which she alone visited, and began to consider the things to be taken out, those to be replaced, and those to be added, so that the guest would want for nothing, and would there find satisfied all the new necessities that he might have acquired at the Court. At this moment they announced to her a visit from the parish

priest, and she went down somewhat surprised, for the hour was most unseasonable. The good gentleman had read in the papers of the terrible catastrophe, and had hastened in dismay to the house of the unfortunate mother, to prepare her little by little, before any thoughtless person should suddenly tell her the news.

With many misgivings and evasions, and without knowing himself what he said, he began his sad task, telling her at last that her son was very seriously ill in Madrid. The poor woman sprang from her chair pale, surprised, and even irritated, as if it was some horrible joke they were playing upon her.

"Impossible!" she cried; "he wrote to me yesterday! I have the letter here!"

And she flew around the room looking for it as one demented, and spread it out before the priest trembling like a leaf, with her eyes starting from their sockets, and feeling horrible cold chills all over her body.

"You see! You see!" she cried. "He will be here for the month of August to remain until the Feast of Our Lady of Regla; and on the third he is going to confession. No, no, impossible that he should die — my darling boy!"

The three children and the two servants came running in, all pale with fright, anticipating, upon hearing the cries of their mother after the arrival of their pastor, some fearful catastrophe. The latter took the letter, but understood from the date that the unhappy boy had written it a few hours before his death.

"Unfortunately, my news is of a later date," he said. "After writing this, he was stricken with a sudden stroke of apoplexy, and is very ill indeed."

"My God! Blessed Virgin of Regla!" exclaimed the mother; and grasping the priest by the arm, and fixing her eyes upon his face, she asked with white lips: —

"Has he made his confession? Do you know if he has confessed?" The priest did not reply, and she repeated the question, shaking him by the arm.

"His soul, father! his soul above all things!" she exclaimed with an anguish which would have broken a heart of stone. He was obliged to tell her he knew nothing of that, and she, suddenly suppressing her grief, gave orders that they should leave for Madrid that very day, that very moment, — dry, laconic, explicit orders, the outlets of her immense grief goaded on by impatience. The mail-coach passed at four o'clock, and it would take two hours to drive to the nearest railway station. Henry would go with her. Peter, at a gesture from his mother, ran to the cab-stand to order a carriage; the servants hastened to pack the trunks; little Louis, the baby, began to cry; his mother kissed him on the forehead. "Don't cry," she said.

She did not shed a tear; the pastor, frightened, wished to detain her.

"But if you should not catch the train?" he said.

"They can run a special."

"But that will cost a great deal."

"I have ten thousand reals in the house; and if that is not enough we can sell everything, we can beg."

"But, madam, wait!"

"And his soul, father? his soul?" she cried with her eyes wide open. "Do you think death will wait? And he there all alone, alone, the child of my heart, without his mother to make him confess, to help him to die well, if God calls him, to close his eyes and place him in his grave!"

Little Peter came back greatly excited, his little hands trembling, trying to smile, but in vain. His voice failed him; he had not gone all the way to the cab-stand. Why pursue misfortune when hope runs to meet one? On the way Martin Romero told him he had news that Juanito was better, almost entirely well.

"You see? You see?" cried the mother, triumphant. And a great cry of joy escaped her. She burst out laughing wildly, choking down her mirth with deep tearless sobs. The priest hastened to give the lie to this false news, the result of a stupid compassion, and he was now obliged to

tell her at once that her son was dead. But he stopped terrified, for he had not the courage to tell her how, or when. She received the blow shrinking, retreating, and staggering, sinking into a chair, without voice, without pulse, without breath, and without tears, shaking her head and working her lips insanely, pressing both hands to her heart, where she felt something which had suddenly died within her, something frozen and terrible as death itself. The pastor cried like a child and tried to console her; she listened to him with her eyes fixed and glazed as one listens to a wind that howls, without understanding what its terrifying moans signify, but knowing well that they bring with them lightning and tempest. Her children threw themselves into her arms crying; and at the contact of these three heads her mother's-heart awoke, a great sob rent her breast, her grief at last finding an outlet, a relief, and a comfort in tears.

Every one in the village respected this terrible affliction, and no one had the courage to relate to her the dreadful details of her son's death. But three days later Currita's letter arrived, and the unhappy old lady there found them complete. Her mother's instinct made her divine all there was between the lines, and, without uttering a complaint or opening her lips, livid with grief and anger, she tore the bank checks into bits, putting the pieces into an envelope with the letter accompanying them, and returned all to Currita without adding a single syllable. The latter was stupefied upon receiving this strange reply, and shrugging her shoulders, murmured: —

"She must be some queer old woman. Just imagine a thing done, too, with so much delicacy!"

She was very pensive for some time afterwards, because she did not know what to do with those fifteen thousand dollars which she had pretended to present to their legitimate owner. Her Zapiron scruples would not be altogether drowned, and the upright tribunal of her conscience then admonished her to employ them in some beneficent work. It occurred to her to give a grand ball, a brilliant and sensa-

tional entertainment for the benefit of the children of the Foundling Hospital; but the season was already much advanced, people had been almost suffocated a few nights before at the Marquis of Butron's ball, and she must, besides, start upon her journey to Belgium the latter part of the week. She then had a most happy idea, — to make with this money a splendid donation to Pope Pius IX. when she went to visit him in Rome in the beginning of the autumn. She was thoroughly enraptured with this thought, which silenced her scruples and satisfied her vanity, imagining she already saw in all the papers pompous praises attributed to the pious munificence of her Excellency the Countess of Albornoz. That night about nine o'clock Maria Valdivieso came in very much excited. It was absolutely necessary that Currita should accompany her to Prince Alfonso's circus. Miss Jessup, an enchanting *diva* and the daughter of an American general, was to make her début. She had come recommended to Pepa Alcocer, and to various others of the nobility, so Paco Velez had said. Last Monday, the very day Velarde died, she sang at Alcocer's house the final rondeau from *Cenerentola*.

"My dear! never in my life have I heard anything to equal it; it will have an astonishing success. So get ready and let us go; I don't care to miss the final aria of the first act. My dear! what a great truth is that! I am going to apply it." And she began to sing with a very bad voice and detestable ear, the —

> "Sempre libera deggio
> Transvolar di gioja in gioja."

from *La Traviata*, an opera at that time very much in vogue, and which had been selected by Miss Jessup in which to present herself for the first time on the Madrid stage.

"Ah! no, no," said Currita, who was feeling out of sorts. "I am not in the humor for opera."

"But, my dear, are you going to bury yourself alive? You have n't been out for three days."

"Well, you must see, I'm in mourning."

"But you have already worn it five days. How long do you propose to keep it on? I would not have worn it ten minutes for Juanito Velarde; for, no matter what you say, he was very senseless, child, very senseless indeed."

"Very well, to-night I will put on half-mourning. I have a gown which I have never worn that will exactly suit — black and white; it is pretty, but I don't think it would do for anything else."

"Well, take advantage of the occasion, silly, and get ready quickly; it is very late." And she herself rose to ring the bell and to give Kate the necessary orders.

Currita dressed very quickly, and in the meantime the Countess of Valdivieso conversed, dilating upon the voice and the beauty of Miss Jessup, and how splendid Stagno had been the night before in "*Un Ballo in Maschera*," especially in the final aria, when they were assassinating him. Paco Velez had told her about it.

"Listen: apropos of dead people, have you received an answer from Velarde's mother yet?"

"Just to-day I had a letter. Certainly she must be a queer old body."

Kate took the liberty of interrupting the two cousins, asking if her Ladyship would wear black or white gloves.

"What do you think, Maria?"

"The white ones would go well."

"I think the black ones would look better."

"Bring a pair of each color and we will see."

"Yes, indeed, she must be a very queer old woman! Just imagine, she has refused to accept the pension."

"Heavens! my dear, what eccentricity!"

"As you shall hear. She writes me a letter, very much indebted, very high sounding, with its small share of moral duties, and Divine Providence, and concludes by saying she needs nothing and has more than enough."

"All the better for you, then; that will suit you much better."

"Yes, but you don't understand. I had already made the sacrifice for poor Juanito, and not because his proud mother refuses it am I going to retract. For that reason I have been thinking that when I go to Rome in October, I will make a donation of the fifteen thousand dollars to his Holiness, so that he may grant Velarde indulgences."

Maria Valdivieso was very much edified, and the two cousins went out, Currita, distracted by the conversation, picking up one white glove and one black glove. She discovered her mistake in putting them on, when already very near the theatre, and wanted to return to her house to change them. But the Countess of Valdivieso, convulsed with laughter, said: —

"Don't be silly, dear; leave them alone. People will take it for an original idea, and to-morrow the fashion will be started."

"True! true!" cried Currita, enchanted.

And it really happened so; this new caprice seemed very *chic* to every one, and the following night, in the theatre, one saw everywhere costumes of two different shades, with gloves of two distinct colors.

Miss Jessup's début obtained a sensational ovation, and a ridiculous incident was the only thing to be regretted. At the end of the last act, when the heroine was expiring on the stage, and Alfred, his father, and the doctor were intoning the last trio, a gust of stage wind unthinkingly struck the diva and drew from her, after death, a formidable sneeze.

The following day nothing else was spoken of in Madrid except the ovation to Miss Jessup, her inopportune sneeze, and Currita's gloves. No one remembered any longer the appointment of first lady-in-waiting, or Velarde's death, or the registration of police.

Currita now breathed tranquilly, seeing completely removed, thanks to her manœuvres, the serious consequences which Butron had prophesied upon her appointment as first lady-in-waiting; her political fidelity was now established

beyond a doubt, producing among other results three different *trifles*: —

A disconsolate mother;

A soul in hell;

And the fashion of the different gloves.

Meanwhile Villamelon was preparing with great diligence the photographs from which they would select the engravings for the illustrated Review. All the rest he had cast aside into the box of Byzantine questions.

CHAPTER XII

The express train from Marseilles to Paris was delayed four hours, owing to a bridge having been destroyed the night before, between Galician and St. Giles. The passengers reached the great capital at half-past four, alighting in the *gare de Lyon*, hungry and out of temper. A man about thirty years of age was the first to spring out from a sleeping-car, and crossing the street before the crowd invaded it, reached the *carrefour*, with that confident manner exempt from all perplexity which always proclaims the traveller experienced in Custom-House snares, stations, and railroads. There he signalled the first of the many cabs which waited in orderly file, and the cabman drove up hurriedly, first measuring with a glance from head to foot the appearance of the traveller. The only baggage the latter carried was one of those English travelling-cases, rolled up in a leather strap, which contain so much in such a small space, and are sufficient to hold everything necessary to any English tourist who proposes to make a tour of the world. The coachman seemed to be satisfied with his examination; for among the rich furs which lined the traveller's cloak, his quick sight had discovered that which is sufficient to constitute a great personage in the eyes of

the Parisian populace, — a little yellow and white ribbon tied in the button-hole of his coat. *Il était décoré!* Upon stepping into the cab, the traveller limited himself to saying in very well pronounced French: —

"Grand Hôtel; Boulevard des Capucines."

The cab dashed forward, rocking from side to side like any Spanish *simon*,[1] and the traveller did not seem to experience any of that surprise mixed with admiration, curiosity, and enthusiasm, which seizes every one who visits Paris for the first, second, third, and even fourth or fifth time. He leaned back on the worn-out blue cloth cushions of the carriage, and, without even heeding the first murmur of life in Paris, which issued from the noisy Place de la Bastille, into which opened four boulevards and ten streets, and which already began to deafen and stun him, he began to look very carefully over some papers contained in a knapsack, which was flung across his shoulder from right to left. None of them were missing; in the right-hand pocket there were several open letters, some loose papers, and a small package of bank-notes. In the left-hand pocket was a large official letter, sealed with a royal crown, upon red sealing-wax. The envelope was addressed —

"To His Royal Highness the Duke of Aosta,
King of Spain."

The traveller turned the large letter over several times, with a certain suppressed curiosity, and even went so far as to hold it up to the light, trying to decipher through the envelope something of what was written within. The satin surface of the rich linen paper did not, however, reveal its secret, and the traveller had to content himself with reading again and again those large and running letters of the address, traced by a hand more accustomed to sign and make notes than to write at length, and evidently so proudly

[1] Cab. — Tr.

Italian that it placed the small dukedom of Aosta before the royal crown of Spain.

Meanwhile the cab had crossed Boulevard Beaumarchais, and Boulevard Filles du Calvaire, and had reached the Boulevard du Temple, without the traveller having directed a single glance at the wonders which Paris was unrolling before his eyes, as he advanced towards the Boulevard des Capucines, the dizzy centre of the great Babylon, and the gilded and perfumed rendezvous where vice and folly flock from the four corners of the globe to wallow at the cost of their gold. There the street is converted into a square, the sidewalk into a street, and the multitude into a torrent which precipitates itself, with a certain relative silence, between two walls of glass, formed by the immense shop-mirrors, filled with all that human industry can do to convert luxuries into necessities, elegance into gaudiness, the valuable into the wonderful, and life into a fever of mad vanities and monstrous concupiscences.

The traveller, absorbed in his reflections, in the midst of this immense multitude, whose characteristic trait is always that of the idler in pursuit of pleasure, and not of one in search of work, had just taken from his pocket a little Russian-leather memorandum-book and begun to adjust in it his entangled accounts. At the head of one page he wrote "Expectations," and at the head of another, "Realizations," and so under that which he doubtless expected, as under that which he seemingly possessed, he began to add up figures which resulted in numbers, and these in their turn became sums, balances, multiplications, and divisions which confounded themselves in an arithmetical chaos, and finally produced in the column of "Expectations," beneath a horizontal line, this total, impregnated with mystery: "Two hundred thousand dollars and one cabinet portfolio." On the page of "Realizations," the result needed no interpretation whatsoever; it simply said, "Naught."

And as if some illusory error might yet glide into this absolute destitution of realities, the traveller, scratching

at times with the end of the pencil his wide and handsome forehead, continued jotting down figures and making calculations, until he drew another horizontal line, straight, black, and inflexible as an adverse fate, beneath which appeared this time something less than nothing, a negative quantity, and formidable debt, which was doubtless the only reality in the world which this man possessed.

"150,000 dollars at 15 per cent!"

The traveller remained for a moment looking at this disagreeable total, pressing the pencil between his white teeth until he broke the point, and finally turned away his eyes as if frightened, to fix them upon the most admirable view which the immense Babylon of Paris can offer. The cab was then crossing the Place de la Concorde, watered with the blood of Marie Antoinette and Louis XIV. Opposite was the Royal Avenue closed in at the end by the proud façade of the Madeleine, resting upon its fifty-two gigantic Corinthian columns. In the background behind the bridge de la Concorde, was the Bourbon Palace, surrounded by gardens and statues; on the left was the avenue of the Champs Élsyées, terminating in the vast distance with the Arc du Triomphe; and on the right, this side of the river, hidden among the luxuriant Imperial Gardens, was what still remained of the Tuileries, several walls calcined by the conflagration, — a vast historical error, an effigy of royal greatness, buffeted, spat upon, and assassinated with blows by Rochefort and Louise Michel. In the middle of the square, rising between two monumental fountains like a giant of olden times, was the Luxor obelisk, friend of the Pharaohs and witness of fabulous epochs, which counts the centuries as months, and laughs recalling its Egyptian mummies; that human ant-hill which toiled at its feet, making it repeat what years before a poet had placed upon its granite tongue: —

> "Oh! dans cent ans quels squelettes
> Fera ce peuple impie et fou,
> Qui se couche sans bandelettes
> Dans des cercueils que ferme un clou!"

The traveller, oblivious of everything, took in the entire view with the indifference of one who knows a place to satiety. Only upon leaving the Royal Avenue did his head appear curiously at the window, and his eyes seek from a distance the famous terrace of the Petit Club, more familiarly called Baby, which overlooks the entire Place de la Concorde and is the centre of reunion and favorite observatory of the *haute gomme parisienne.*

The day was magnificent, and beneath an awning of red and white striped canvas several members of the club were smoking and conversing. Upon the stone balcony which overlooks the *place*, two or three youths were leaning, watching the carriages file along the Rue Boissy d'Anglais *en route* to the Bois. The traveller experienced, upon seeing the Club's awning, a certain joyous sensation, and by a spontaneous movement which was almost childish took off his hat to salute it, from that great distance, with as much respect and enthusiasm as if in its shadow he expected to find the minus 150,000 dollars at 15 per cent, whose various calculations formed the sum total of his "Realizations." Doubtless he knew well enough that in the Petit Club, in the innocent Baby, they gambled largely.

Upon uncovering his head, his face was fully exposed to view, presenting a strange and marvellous likeness to Lord Byron. One would have said that the poet in person, abandoning his tomb in Nottingham, was crossing the Place de la Madeleine in a cab, saluting the awning of the Baby as he would the English flag. This man possessed the same striking beauty of the great poet, the same beautiful head gracefully poised upon a vigorous neck, and always disposed to assume the haughty attitude of disdain. His countenance was of the same perfect oval, with a somewhat projecting beard; his dark eyes were most beautiful, and his chestnut hair curled in artistic natural waves upon a wide and noble forehead, which seemed expressly made for a crown of laurels. His lips contracted at the corners with that oblique line of bitterness, disdain, scepticism, and vice, always tired, and never

satisfied, which appears so vividly in faithful photographs of Byron, as if through them were still gliding those crushing words of his *last lament:* —

> "It is not love, it is not hate,
> It is that weariness which springs
> From all I meet, or hear, or see:
> To me no pleasure Beauty brings,
> Thine eyes have scarce a charm for me."

Two things, however, were lacking to make his resemblance to the great poet complete. His left foot was not lame, nor did the ray of genius which inspired Childe Harold beam in his countenance. If by a heavenly prodigy this man was Byron, he had doubtless returned to the world leaving in Nottingham his genius and his lameness, and only bringing with him the beauty of his twenty-five years and the vices of a lifetime. This Byron would not have gone to Greece to liberate it, but rather to exploit it; and in his eyes did not beam a longing for the ideal, but only a reflection of sensuality, eager for money.

Everything about him, however, was elegant and aristocratic; and from the Russian-leather strap with silver clasps and handles which bound his small valise, to the memorandum-book of the same leather, in which he had adjusted his accounts of "Realizations" and "Expectations," was revealed that lordly luxury of minute details common to persons born and accustomed to live always in opulence. Only one thing was out of harmony in his dress; a very caddish detail, which one could only imagine in some famous hair-dresser, or some second-rate Italian singer,— the little yellow and white ribbon which he wore in the button-hole of his travelling coat. But this showed, on the other hand, a profound knowledge of the ground which he trod, where any honorable badge insures the respect and consideration due to a personage. It was a most prudent caution, a sort of shield with which the traveller protected himself from a thousand impertinences, annoying to all and dangerous perhaps to himself.

The cab stopped finally in the Boulevard des Capucines before the vast portico of the Grand Hôtel. Our modern Lord Byron paid the coachman handsomely and went quickly up the steps, meeting by chance at the very door a tall old man with large white whiskers, who was going out limping. The traveller turned rapidly upon seeing him, as if to avoid meeting him, and entered the *bureau de réception* to leave his card. But the old man, hastening his tardy step, and finally overtaking the fugitive, called out to him in Spanish:

"Jacob! *Polaina!* You are running away from me, — a sure sign you have money about you."

"Diogenes! You here!" exclaimed Jacob, turning as if very much surprised and pleased, and extending both hands to him with great effusion.

But Diogenes, shaking his big head and giving him slaps on the back said sententiously: —

> "The man born poor
> Is compared to the cold;
> All from him flee
> Lest he give them catarrh."

"False! very false!" exclaimed Jacob laughing. "Neither were you born poor, nor —"

"I am not poor by birth, but I am in health."

"Then join me; the cold you give me will balance what I give you. You know, old boy, 'Similia similibus curantur.'"

"What did you do in Constantinople, little ambassador? I thought possibly you might bring back the Sultan's beard."

Jacob held up to the level of Diogenes' nose his small satchel, saying, like Simonides, "Omnes divitiae sunt mecum!"

"Honest plenipotentiary!" exclaimed Diogenes. "Let those who will, believe you; of course, *farceur*, you must have left the booty at the station. Whence have you just come?"

"From Geneva. And you, what are you doing here?"

"Suffering from my bad luck, my boy. Last night a knave despoiled me; carried off five thousand francs in a twinkling."

"Is it possible! You still have the inclination? I thought you had sworn off."

"Not until they bury me, my boy, not until then. After a while you must take a turn at the Petit Club; there are big stakes up. Last night that macaw of a Ponoski made a pile of two thousand louis."

"Is Ponoski here? I would see him with pleasure, but I am leaving to-morrow."

"To-morrow. Where the devil are you going?"

"To Madrid."

"To Madrid! *Polaina!* So they will put a bullet through you, I suppose."

"Why, man! What is going on there?"

"Where have you been, little ambassador? Have you not heard the news? This morning Amadeo set out for Lisbon saying, 'Good riddance to bad rubbish;' and at this moment Figuerillas and that little parrot Don Emilio Castelar, must be cannonading the streets of Madrid, in order decently to install the Republic. They have completely outdone you, man! completely."

Jacob was astounded to hear such reports, and grasping Diogenes by the arm, exclaimed in a voice very much changed, and as if this unlooked-for political catastrophe was of great importance to him: —

"What are you talking about? This is impossible!"

"*Polaina!* Come here; some one who knows will tell you. Yesterday the Italian presented his resignation to the Court, and an hour afterwards it was accepted. To-day he left for Lisbon at six o'clock, and at this moment Madrid must be ablaze on all sides. Already more than twenty telegrams have arrived at the Grand Hotel asking for rooms." And while Diogenes, very much excited, was saying this, he went with Jacob up the steps which led from the court-yard to the terrace of the Grand Hôtel. Any one there might easily

have imagined himself in an aristocratic drawing-room of the Court of Spain. Spanish was heard on all sides, spoken with that vehemence, and with those outcries, common to the race when excited; while, scattered in groups and circles here and there, one saw men and women of the Spanish aristocracy, Isabella II. politicians, and many of those nameless personages whom one sees at all hours and everywhere without being able to say aught of them, except that they are such and such a Smith, or Jones. All were discussing the news from Spain, making imaginary prognostications according to the vehemence of their desires; and while some already saw Prince Alfonso on the throne abandoned by Aosta, others pictured to themselves the Republic established under the protection of the popular masses; and not a few saw the Carlist soldiers at the very gates of Madrid, taking possession of the deserted palace and vacant throne.

Fear and distance always make things look dark, and all were of the opinion that Madrid must at this moment be already converted into an immense pool of blood. They were thus most anxiously awaiting the arrival of the mail, and with still greater impatience Uncle Frasquito's return, who had gone to the Jouffroy Passage in quest of news. General Pastor and Canovas del Castillo, who had been summoned in great haste by the dethroned queen to the Basilewsky palace, were also anxiously expected. To the right of the lower reading-room door, which opens out upon the terrace, several ladies were seated upon iron benches, Currita Albornoz and the Duchess of Bara being among them. Farther on, and standing in the midst of a group of men, Leopoldina Pastor was declaiming with great vehemence, proposing that they should take arms, and expounding her strategic plan. The thing was most simple; it was sufficient for the Spanish colony resident in Paris to present themselves at the Spanish Embassy, seize the ambassador by the arm, and put him into the street, then and there proclaiming Prince Alfonso King of Spain. From the other

side of the Pyrenees they would unanimously approve. If the ambassador made an outcry, they would plunge him in the Seine, for said Don Salustiano had a stomach sufficiently large to float like a buoy. If Thiers got angry, they would grasp him by his small tuft of hair and would send him to mind his household affairs, leaving his neighbor's affairs in peace, and all could be done in a twinkling.

The men laughed, listening to Leopoldina, and she tugged them by the buttons of their waistcoats, calling them good-for-nothings. Ah! if she only wore trousers! And really she was nearly upon the point of donning them, like Miss Walker, the physician of the Tunis seraglio, who in those days promenaded the boulevards in Zouave breeches and a slouched hat. Jacob's arrival produced a bad impression upon every one: he was connected with the majority of those present by ties of friendship or kindred, on his family's side as well as on that of his wife's, who held a title most illustrious among the nobility. Having separated from the latter ten years previously, he had led in Paris and in Italy a most luxurious bachelor's life, until, pursued by his creditors, he had taken refuge again in Spain in the year 1868, playing a most active part in the Revolution, and journeying by the side of Prim through the Andalusian provinces, haranguing the multitudes, mounted, like Lafayette, upon a white horse. He had formed part of the Constitutional Courts of 1869, and suddenly, at the time of Prim's assassination, had disappeared again from Madrid, reappearing shortly afterwards in Constantinople, as Minister Plenipotentiary. All were then mystified to see him appear at such a critical moment in Paris, abandoning his high diplomatic post, and they received him with that scornful suspicion which the routed enemy always inspires who passes after the battle to the victorious side.

Jacob, however, pretending not to notice the coldness with which he was received, ascertained of his own accord the truth of Diogenes' news, without allowing the uneasiness which it had caused him a moment before to be discerned.

He was completely ignorant of everything, or appeared to be; two months before he had left Constantinople for Turin, then going on to Florence and Geneva, and afterwards making a delightful journey along the Italian Corniche, stopping in Bordighera, in Nice, and lastly for nearly a week in Monaco.

Currita from her seat was gazing intently at the handsome traveller, the picture of Lord Byron, her favorite hero and adorable type of manhood, whose magnificent nude bust, sculptured in white marble she had always in sight in her boudoir. At first she did not know him, it being difficult to recognize in this haughty man the delicate young stripling Jacob Tellez Ponce, married twelve years before to the Marchioness of Sabadell, a distant cousin of Currita's. Since then the latter had not seen him, and would never have recognized him if Leopoldina Pastor, approaching her, had not said: —

"Do you see Jacob Tellez? They say he was married to a beautiful Turkish woman in Constantinople. I wonder if he has brought the good-for-nothing here."

The Duchess of Bara made some impertinent reply, looking at him disdainfully; the ladies laughed and Currita exclaimed, much astonished: —

"Why! is that Jacob? Who would believe it? If I did not think it was Byron in person, my favorite poet! What a perfect likeness!" And without waiting for more explanations she rose up quickly to go to meet him. The Duchess of Bara pulled her back quickly by the skirt, but she, trying to release herself, said: —

"Why, my dear, he is my own cousin. His wife's grandmother and mine were second cousins. How am I going to slight a relative?"

Jacob, attracted no doubt also by family love, at that moment approached the group of ladies and saluted them, first kissing the Duchess's hand, and then Currita's, they being his nearest connections; and the latter, with a thousand affectionate flatteries, made room for him by her side on the iron

bench. The conversation turned for a moment upon Jacob's journey, until the entrance of Uncle Frasquito, returning from the Jouffroy Passage laden with news, interrupted it. Everybody ran to meet him, Jacob among the first, but Currita, detaining him for a moment by the arm, with the familiarity of fourth cousin to his legitimate spouse, said to him: —

"Shall we see anything of you, Jacob? I should like to present you to Fernandito. Our rooms are on the second floor, No. 120."

The Duchess leaned towards Leopoldina, saying in a whisper: —

"Do you hear that? She wants to present him to Fernandito."

Leopoldina made a wry face and replied: —

"Well, I suppose we must be blind and deaf." And the two laughed with innocent merriment.

CHAPTER XIII

Pasted up, dyed, combed, shining with cosmetics, and dancing on the tips of his toes, being unable to walk any other way on account of his tight boots, which tortured without altogether diminishing the size of two protruding bunions, Uncle Frasquito came up on the terrace in great haste. He was the universal uncle of all the grandees of Spain, and of those second-class noblemen of his own rank, of very rich men from all cradles, of political and literary notabilities, official vagabonds, daring adventurers, and anonymous personages, who formed the "all Madrid" of the Court, the motley *dessus du panier* of the great social Madrid world.

All these people called him "Uncle Frasquito," because good form had so decreed it, and he complacently accepted the relationship with all whose blue blood, a century or two before, had really mingled with his most illustrious own.

All others, without, however, rejecting the fictitious relationship, he placed with a certain protecting condescension in the category of spurious nephews. In the midst of this universal family, Uncle Frasquito had been conspicuous for upward of half a century, seeing defile before him generation after generation of nephews and nieces, legitimate or spurious, who were born, grew up, married, had children, died, and were forgotten, without his ever having passed his thirty-third year, shielded as he was behind the extremely tight corset which subjugated the insolent rebelliousness of his abdomen. His years were similar to Daniel's weeks, being years within years, although, more accommodating than the former, they lengthened or shortened as circumstances demanded. He was thirty-three years old when in the year '40 he was present at the Queen of England's wedding, accompanying the Envoy Extraordinary of the Court of Spain, and he was of the same age in 1853, when he witnessed the marriage of his niece Eugénie de Guzman, with the Emperor Napoleon III.; an unequal match and a humiliating *mésalliance* which Uncle Frasquito heartily condemned. Bonaparte's lineage did not altogether satisfy him, although he never went so far as to relegate the new nephew to the spurious category; neither did he consent to designate him in any other way than by the name of "My nephew the Count consort of Teba."[1]

The story circulated that Uncle Frasquito wore on his person thirty-two false articles, among which was enumerated a cork hip. It is certain that, at the moment in which we present him to our readers, returning from the Jouffroy Passage, to confirm to his compatriots the news of the Duke of Aosta's abdication, obesity had changed his stripling figure into an Alcorcón *puchero*,[2] while art, industry, and even mechanism worked jointly and pertinaciously in the daily restoration of this withered Narcissus, who lived in continual

[1] It is well known that the Empress Eugénie, before her marriage, held the illustrious family title of Countess of Teba.

[2] Spanish dish, a sort of stew. — Tr.

risk of being converted into a spinage-beet, as the ancient Narcissus of Greek mythology was transformed into a flower.

Uncle Frasquito was a rich bachelor, lived temperately, had no known vices, nor debts; he was affable, courteous, obsequious, and pleasing, with the manners of a modest maid, and inflections in his voice like those of an affected young lady. He collected diplomatic stamps, embroidered on tapestry, played the flute badly, and pronounced his *r*'s in that guttural and lame manner common to the Parisians, which some Frenchified *élégants* imitate in Spain, and which in many others is a natural defect.

Diogenes usually called him Francesca di Rimini, and sometimes seña Frasquito, and persecuted him and pursued him through drawing-rooms and salons, and even among the ladies, where the effeminate nobleman was accustomed to take refuge, giving him impetuous embraces, which rumpled and stained his immaculate shirt-front, and extemporaneous kisses which obliged the dainty old gentleman to wash and rub himself with cold cream. He would tread upon his victim's feet with seeming unconsciousness, causing his bunions to start, and tarnishing his boots, or would give him beastly hand-squeezes, which dislocated his fingers, the thirty-two components which the legend assigned to his person incurring the risk of being scattered in all directions. These two old men, with characters and manners so different, were nevertheless two ancient types of the same society, two fossil examples of those noblemen of the past century, some vulgarly vicious and cynical, others unsubstantial and effeminate fops, who were the cause in Spain of the ruin and discredit of the nobility.

Uncle Frasquito came up on the terrace with the manner of an afflicted maiden, and everybody surrounded him, besieging him with questions. All was confirmed by new reports, and the *sauve qui peut* was general in Madrid. The news that Don Amadeo had fled with his family to Lisbon was corroborated, and the telegraph had transmitted the

names of those persons who formed the first cabinet of the new-born Republic.

"Of the Spanish Rrrepublic!" exclaimed Uncle Frasquito, taking off his hat with burlesque solemnity. And amidst scornful laughs, and ironical observations, he began to read aloud from his elegant little memorandum-book, where the names of the new ministers were jotted down.

"But what names, great heavens![1] It is enough to make one die of laughter! Figueras, Castelar, Pi y Margall, the two Salmerones, Nicholas and Paquito — Cordoba!"

"Corrdoba! friends, Corrdoba! Fernandito Corrdoba a rrepublican! Who would have thought it, when we went together to Benavente's house, the time that Ferrnando VII. sent him to Portugal with his brother Louis, in the absence of the *infante* Don Carrlos, and the Princess of Beyrra? Of course I was then but a child, a veritable baby."

Uncle Frasquito did not take into consideration that, according to these dates, he would have been obliged to assist, six years before his birth, at the Duchess of Benavente's balls. He continued enumerating the names of the remaining ministers, — Echegaray, Beranger, and Becerra! Great heavens! but this, indeed, was a slap in the face for Spain; and those little dwarfs with liberty caps chaining the Castilian lion recalled to mind that magnificent image, —

> "Ce grand peuple espagnol au membres énervés,
> Expire dans cet antre où son sort le termine,
> Triste comme un lion rongé par la vermine!"

"How facetiously caddish those democrats always are! The first thing that occurred to them was to serenade that most interesting Don Emilio, by playing the *Marseillaise*."

[1] The reader will understand that the criticisms of actually existing persons, proceeding from the mouths of the characters in this novel, are not the author's own judgments, but rather the reflex of those opinions formed in that epoch by the portion of society which said persons represent. The author, so devoid of scruples of any kind when attacking vice and insolence to its face, always reserves his opinion of actual persons, and finds himself far from pretending to wound any personality whatsoever, no matter how despicable it may appear to him.

"Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira —
Celui qui s'élève on l'abaissera.
Celui qui s'abaisse on l'élèvera.
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira!"

"How delicious!" exclaimed Currita. "And did he make them a little speech?"

"I should think so! — from his balcony, as Neilson sang in Vienna; and later on regaled the crowd with bonbons and cigarettes."

"Delightful, really! Doubtless this winter he will give receptions."

"Yes; for the citizens *sans culottes*."

"*Polaina!*" exclaimed Diogenes. "In whatever doorway they hang out a ham, there all Madrid will flock, and you, Curra, will be among the first to go."

Uncle Frasquito was terrified upon hearing Diogenes' voice, and, fearing some of his effusive demonstrations of affection, scurried away surreptitiously, almost whispering his last piece of news: The telegrams also announced that Don Carlos had entered Spain through Zugarramurdi, and that his partisans, taking advantage of the confusion, were preparing to make a supreme effort to take possession of the throne. This disgusted everybody, as it seemed to them the Carlists were more to be feared than the Republic; but at this moment a tall old man of martial aspect, with long, twisted, white whiskers, came in to arouse their drooping spirits. It was General Pastor, Leopoldina's brother, who had returned from his conference with the Queen in the Basilewsky palace.

The general entered as radiant and satisfied as if he already saw in perspective the portfolio of war, and answering with smiles and empty words the thousand questions showered upon him from all sides, hastened to deliver a message to the Countess of Albornoz and the Duchess of Bara from her Majesty the Queen. The latter had appointed them to accompany her the following day to the Expiatory Chapel of the Boulevard Haussman, where the

anniversary mass, that year somewhat delayed, of the unfortunate Louis XVI. was to be celebrated. The spectacle promised to be curious, as the princes of Orléans, reconciled with the Comte de Chambord, would assist for the first time in public at these symbolical rites.

General Pastor then opened his budget of news, letting it be understood, with a certain political vanity, that he concealed more than he disclosed. He confirmed everything that had been said by Uncle Frasquito, adding that the proclamation of the Republic was a gigantic step taken towards the Restoration, that the most terrible disorders would soon break out in Spain, and that the European Powers, alarmed by the experiences of the Commune in France, would hasten to intervene in favor of Prince Alfonso. Secret notes from several foreign ambassadors had already arrived at the Basilewsky palace, and Thiers himself, fearful lest the wrath of the allied monarchies should fall upon his head, refused to recognize the new Republic. Only Mr. Hamlin, United States minister to Spain, had hastened to recognize the new order of things in the name of his government, presenting himself at the President's palace with all the ceremony customary in monarchial times, and suggesting in his speech, with the jesting formality of Jonathan in person, that "The United States could not but contemplate with sympathy and emotion the kingdom of Ferdinand and Isabella converted into a republic."

"Out upon the good-for-nothing!" exclaimed Leopoldina Pastor, in a rage. "These *farceur* Yankees know no difference between Figueras and Ferdinand the Catholic, and a cotton cap is the same to them as a crown. Cotton is king! How interesting! And to think that only three weeks ago we all danced at his house! Really, it seems, after all, we lose all shame when it is a question of amusing ourselves."

"Tu dixisti!"[1] cried Diogenes, with much warmth.

"And I repeat it," continued Leopoldina, "but I can assure the good-for-nothing he will have to hear from my lips

[1] Thou hast said it. — Tr.

four well pronounced little words. Indeed, I had foreseen this. At his last ball he wore blue cotton stockings."

"Because his father-in-law has a factory in Boston."

"How delicious!" exclaimed Currita; "when they confer the garter upon the son-in-law the father-in-law can present him with the stocking."

"Doubtless he announced the fact upon terminating his discourse at the President's house, like the Yankee preacher who concluded his sermon by saying: 'I have shown you, my beloved brethren, that only by virtue can one gain heaven. It only remains for me to recommend to you, in conclusion, Mr. Francis Morton's magnificent hat factory, 24 Catherine Street. His entire stock is of the best and cheapest, — net cash, — in other words, not on credit.'"

The electric bell which announces *aux hommes d'équipe* the arrival of new travellers began to ring at this moment, and presently Gorito Sardona came in, very much excited, announcing that Lopez Moreno's wife had just that moment alighted at the Grand Hôtel, having come from Madrid, and that she had been nearly assassinated on the way.

"One of her ears is hanging!" he added, pulling his own.

The company were horrified, and all went out to meet her, anxious to see the earless banker's wife. The Duchess, however, fearing, no doubt, that the former would transfer to her ears the famous mortgages which she had upon her lands, tried to slip out through the reading-room, but so unsuccessfully that in the very court-yard she ran up against the lady, her daughter Lucy, two maids, a man servant, seventeen trunks, and an unlimited number of boxes and bandboxes. The banker's wife had arrived, pale and dejected, and the lobe of her left ear was really bleeding.

Upon seeing herself caught, the Duchess went forward to meet Lopez Moreno's wife, exclaiming very affectionately:

"Ramona, my dear! why did you not let me know?"

"Let you know?" exclaimed the lady in a frightened manner. "I am thankful to have arrived alive! What a journey, Duchess, what a journey! On the way I was

nearly assassinated. I revived yesterday; it was a miracle, a miracle!"

"Horrors!" exclaimed the Duchess, at the same time looking about her, with the hope that Providence had not also spared Mr. Lopez Moreno, and adding: —

"But where is your husband? Is he not coming?"

The tender wife made another frightened gesture, and answered without being overmuch affected: —

"He is in Matapuerca, if he is alive!"

"In Matapuerca?" exclaimed Diogenes. "It cannot be! He must be in Matapuerco."

"No, no, in Matapuerca," replied Lopez Moreno's wife, without understanding the old man's joke.

And surrounded by all the Spaniards, who attracted by curiosity had come gradually flocking around, the voluble lady began the narration of her misfortunes. Spain was from that moment certainly going to ruin. People were escaping from Madrid in flocks, and it really seemed as if the trumpet of the last judgment had resounded in the Court.

"I should be delighted!" exclaimed Diogenes. "I have been waiting for that little trumpet. What things will be revealed when the angel says: 'Every dollar to its owner, and every child to its father!'"

The Duchess silenced him with a tap from her fan, and Lopez Moreno's wife, filled with satisfaction upon seeing herself the centre of attraction, continued the narration of her fright, which was atrocious and barbarous. "The train was made up of forty-two coaches, crammed with people who were going to Biarritz, San Juan de Luz, Bayonne, anywhere, provided they passed the frontier. At Victoria another engine was added, and four companies of Luchana's regiment got in. Dreadful! During the night everything went well; but upon reaching Alsásua, Holy Virgin! There were the Carlists! and almost immediately upon our arrival, — prurrrrummn! a most frightful volley was discharged! — and suddenly, my dear, suddenly, without any warning

whatsoever, without even saying, One, two, three, fire; nothing, nothing, only prurrrrummn! Let fall who may! The troops of course answered, prurrrrummn! with another volley. I dropped as if dead, and Lucy too, under the seat, without even breathing, and — prurrrrummn! above, and prurrrrummn! below, an hour and a half of firing! Presently the little window opened, a hand was thrust in which grasped me by the ear and then disappeared."

"How atrocious!" they all exclaimed, and Gorito Sardona, with his crude formality, added: —

"Did they think of making a cutlet?"

"No, sir," replied the victim, somewhat nettled. "What they thought of doing, and what they did do, was to carry off a diamond which I wore, worth five hundred dollars. Afterwards they said it was one of the station loafers, but no one can make me believe but that it was the curate of Santa Cruz, as it occurred in the middle of the tunnel, in the dark, and on the opposite wall I distinctly saw the shadow of his tile hat."

"How barbarous!"

"But did you see the Carlists?"

"Did I see them? As we came out of the tunnel, there was an army of them on a height; and in the middle was one with epaulets, who was Don Carlos. Lucy says no, but I know it was, — a very small, squint-eyed man, with a red beard and pock-marked, who did so, with his handkerchief."

And Lopez Moreno's wife waved hers vigorously, with a dreadful gesture of menace.

"But Don Carlos is very tall and dark, with a black beard. I knew him at Vevey."

"Then he was disguised; it would not be so difficult for him to dye his beard red."

"But it would be impossible, being over six feet tall, for him to shrink to the half that height."

"It may be that I am mistaken, but I doubt it," replied the lady, who did not easily renounce the honor of having been menaced by a royal fist. General Pastor listened to all

this very complacently, seeing in this catastrophe the first mutterings of the terrible tempest which was about to break loose in Spain. From this chaos the Restoration would come forth, and the policy of the party therefore directed all its forces to excite and maintain disorder. A thoughtless remark of the General's revealed to those best informed that he was thoroughly aware of all that was going on. He asked Lopez Moreno's wife if upon her departure from Madrid anything had been said in the Court about socialistic uprisings in Andalusia.

"And you ask me that?" exclaimed the banker's wife, with energetic wrath. "Do you mean to say you know nothing of what has happened in Matapuerca?"

"Ah! my dear lady," interrupted Currita, with all her aristocratic impertinence, "could it not be Mata — something else?"

"But it is called Matapuerca.[1] It is a magnificent pasture ground in the Province of Extremadura, of more than three thousand *aranzadas*[2] with twenty villages, — Really, a small kingdom. It belonged to the Augustinian monks, and my husband bought it at the time of the Mendizabal affair."

Currita made a gesture of most patient resignation and asked: —

"And what has happened in the little kingdom of Mata- — those little animals?"

"Nothing much, a mere trifle! When the Republic was proclaimed, a horde of those bandits invaded the pasture, assassinated the overseer and three keepers, and divided the lands between them. Lopez Moreno started for the place instantly, and I am most uneasy, for I don't know what he is going to do."

"What should he do?" exclaimed Diogenes. "*Polaina!* What the Augustinian monks did, when your husband and Mendizabal took the pasture from them. They had patience, madam! To every hog comes its St. Martin, Doña Ramona; did you imagine he would fail to come to the hogs of Mata-

[1] Mata-puerco, kill-hog. — Tr. [2] A measure of land. — Tr.

puerca? The Socialists! friends, the Socialists! They have learned logic; behold the new avengers!"

Lopez Moreno's wife was about to reply very sharply, but General Pastor, rubbing his hands with joy, stopped her, saying: —

"You bring us excellent news, madam; things are progressing finely, much better than I expected."

"Well, just listen!" exclaimed the banker's wife, stupefied. "You would not say the same if they had robbed you of a pasture, and carried off an ear with a diamond worth five hundred dollars."

"It is nothing, Doña Ramona; you will have to resign yourself to be for some time the dethroned queen of Matapuerca. The Restoration will soon re-establish you on your throne; and do you know what I have been thinking?" added the general as if struck by a sudden idea. "That the Queen would be very much pleased to hear from yourself this news. Would it inconvenience you to go to the Palace?"

The banker's wife was overwhelmed with satisfaction, and the Duchess, who hastened to pay her with honors and attentions what she did not pay with money, exclaimed enthusiastically: —

"A magnificent idea! I will take her myself. To-morrow I will ask the Queen for an audience."

"The Queen will certainly be delighted to hear her," observed Currita, meaningly. "Doña Ramona narrates very well, and uses certain imitative expressions with much effect. Every time she says 'prurrrrummn!' it really seems as if one smelt the powder. How delicious to hear her relate the *degringolade* of Matapuerca!"

Lopez Moreno's wife did not understand anything of all this, affected and occupied as she was in thanking the General and the Duchess. The golden dream of her whole life, to be received at Court, was about to be realized, and for such an honor the cost of a torn ear and a lost pasture ground did not seem too dear. The General for his part followed

Butron's policy to sweep all within, and already calculated the copious incisions which, in the name of the conspirators, his victorious sword would make in the coffers of the Lopez Morenos. During all this scene Currita had not for an instant lost sight of Jacob, who was listening attentively, without hurrying to go to his room to make his toilet and rest. At the breaking up of the reunion, as the dinner hour was approaching, Currita missed him from the terrace; she went quickly into the reading-room, then out into the court-yard, but could not find him anywhere. Uncle Frasquito was at this moment ascending the front staircase, offering his arm to his spurious niece, the dethroned Queen of Matapuerca, who stopped on every step to expatiate upon her terrible fright, the importance of her pasture ground, the pain in her ear, and the horror of those thundering volleys.

Prurrrrummn!

CHAPTER XIV

Opportunity is always the precursor of success, and arriving on time has erected the pedestal of numerous celebrities, and crowned many heroes with laurels. Every character, then, requires special circumstances to favor it, an educated epoch to serve as a background, and an opportune historical moment to permit it to unfold in all its strength. A Hercules in prehistoric times, or a Cid in chivalric times, would be but a Quixote in the times of double entry and so much per cent. An Espartero and a Mendizabal, on the contrary, would have been in those remote ages, one a money-lending Jew, the other a member of the Santa Hermandad.

Jacob Tellez believed that he had the misfortune to be born at the wrong time and in the wrong place. Amid the sanguinary waves of the great French Revolution he judged that he might have been a Mirabeau on account of his talent, or a Lafayette because of his courage; but in the

miry whirlpools of the Spanish Revolution of '68, he was only, in the opinion of those who knew him, a poor devil as a politician, and a great fool as a leader.

Those two great figures, aristocratic renegades like himself, completely fascinated him; but Mirabeau's wig and Lafayette's coat were too big for him, and in wishing to amalgamate in himself these two personalities, breaking moral ties like the first, and seducing the multitudes like the second, he succeeded in becoming only an infatuated impostor. Even so, he cut a figure, for there are great Aristides, and small Aristides, — Cincinnati two to the pound, three to the quarter of a pound, and eight to the *jartáa*, which is the way they sell prickly pears in Andalusia.

This revolutionary prickly pear did not get from the aristocratic pine on which he was born to the plebeian fig-tree upon which he blossomed either by dramatic conditions or tragical evolutions; he got there naturally and gently, like the pus behind the swelling; behind the pus, gangrene. He came softly, gliding along the voluptuous declivity which leads from pleasure to vice, vice to aberration, aberration to disgust, disenchantment, and the frightful void of the heart which produces vertigo in the head, and precipitates a man headlong into all sorts of follies and infamies, in search of new pleasures to awaken his blunted sensuality, and of unknown impressions to satiate the voracity of his vitiated concupiscence.

There is nothing more dangerous for a man than to pass in a short time through all the illusions of a lifetime; and Jacob, with that eagerness for enjoyment which characterizes society of the present day, which fears to put off till to-morrow the pleasure which it can enjoy to-day, passing from infancy to decrepit old age, precipitating age and suppressing youth, if by youth is meant the happy age in which noble impulses spring from the heart, and generous ideas surge in the mind, constituting later on, when solidified, great and noble characters, — Jacob, as we have said, had run this long journey in less than thirty years.

At the age of fifteen, no longer subject to tutors and teachers, he was the most gallant *sietemesino*[1] who ever aspired to be shaved, and lead cotillons in the great Court drawing-rooms. At twenty he was a successful Don Juan of bad reputation, who paraded his scandalous adventures in the Veloz Club. At twenty-five, he was an aristocratic profligate, elegant and fashionable, who retreated neither before a duel, nor a steeple-chase, nor a stake of twenty-thousand dollars, and made away with his wife's millions with the same facility with which the magician's enchanted wand makes treasures, hidden and guarded by gnomes and salamanders, flow from the centre of the earth. At thirty, he had seen, like Solomon, *cuncta quæ fiunt sub sole*, but did not understand like him that all was but vanity and affliction of spirit; on the contrary, he wept like Alexander because there was no other world of pleasures to enjoy, while, his heart dry, his intelligence blunted by the premature unfolding of the passions, and his home ruined by reckless prodigalities, he was a rotten fruit which had never yet ripened, a man in the flower of his age with no object in life, a worthless ruin of pleasure and impiety, who did not question the eternal, like Hamlet, but crept through all the corners of the earth, seeking a reservoir of unknown pleasures in which to plunge and wallow and enjoy! Through curiosity and ennui, to amuse himself, and to find in the gloom of mystery something unknown which would resolve itself into pleasure and money, he became a politician. Garibaldi initiated him into the secret lodges of Milan, and Prim introduced him in England into the plot which great traitors were contriving against the Spanish throne.

The Revolution triumphed, and to the agitated emotions of the conspirator, succeeded, in Jacob, the alluring intoxication of triumph, the cynical rapacities of a Roman prætor, and the noisy deifications of pasteboard arches and paper lanterns, when, won over by his verbosity, stupid mobs carried him on their shoulders, frivolous and effemi-

[1] Born at seven months. — Tr.

nate masses praised him for his elegance and beauty, and promised to carry him to Congress to defend from its benches the popular government, — him, the proud aristocrat, renegade in name only, who laughed at them, calling them clowns, ignoramuses, and stupid bourgeois, and who, when they had done shaking hands with him, hastened to rid himself of that insupportable "stench of the canaille" by washing himself with soap and perfume! Very soon a black, gloomy parenthesis opened in his life, before which even slander quailed terrified, for fear of slipping into a pool of blood.

One day, the twenty-seventh of December, a shot in the Calle Turca revealed a piece of the most audacious temerity which ever impelled the Revolution. General Prim had been assassinated, and his intimate friend and standard-bearer, the Marquis of Sabadell, already spoken of for the portfolio of the Interior, disappeared suddenly from the Court at the very time the false news was circulated that the General's wounds were not mortal, and that terrible revelations had escaped him. Prim died, nevertheless, on the thirtieth, carrying with him to the tomb the key of the mystery; and three months afterwards the "Gazette" published a royal decree, appointing the Marquis of Sabadell Minister Plenipotentiary from the Spanish Court to Constantinople. "I am convinced," wrote the new minister to the President of the Council, "that my natural inclinations are for the Oriental life, and I place all my illusions in Cairo, Bagdad, Ispahan, and Constantinople."

The result of these illusions was not long in presenting itself. One morning the Cadi's wife, Sarahi, did not appear at her gilded casement, to gaze at the azure mountains of Asia, and the door of her kiosk remained closed. It was whispered in the palace that the night before a groan had been heard there, and two shadows, which lost themselves in the labyrinth of dark corridors, were seen carrying a black object. The sentinel of the tower of the Sea of Marmora, had heard a sinister splash in the water.

In the morning, on the other side of the Bosphorus, the corpse of a strangled eunuch was found. From the Spanish Legation on the Pera heights, one could see floating upon the limpid blue of the waves his long dark cloak girdled by a whip of hippopotamus leather, the stigma of his class, which had served as a halter. The minister could not see it, for he had left Constantinople that night in so great haste that he carried as baggage only a small valise; and with this valise we have seen Jacob arrive at the Grand Hôtel, after marauding for two months through the gloomiest lodges and most elegant gambling-houses of Italy. The fugitive minister of Constantinople found himself lodged on the fourth floor of the hotel, in a room at twelve francs per day, sufficiently luxurious for one who only possessed in the world a debt of three millions at 15 per cent, and extremely shabby for what his Excellency Sr. Don Jacob Tellez-Ponce Melgarejo, Marquis consort of Sabadell, deemed indispensable to his rank. By the light of a copper candelabrum, which was burning on one end of the mantelpiece, Jacob devoured the Spanish newspapers, full of the new political change which had taken place in Spain, and quoting the comments of the French people, their prognostications and opinions. Frequent exclamations, and even vulgar words escaped him, revealing in him that silent anger which great annoyance awakens in a violent mind. He finally threw aside the papers, furiously irritated for an instant, and clenching his fists with rage. For a long time he sat silent, buried in the depths of an arm-chair, with his mouth contracted, a frown on his brow, and his eyes fixed on the fire in the grate, whose mobile flames lent a red lustre to his countenance. One would have said he was meditating a crime, and also that he had decided upon it when, giving a powerful blow with his fist upon the arm of the chair, he suddenly arose. The mirror which adorned the mantel-piece at this instant reflected his distorted countenance, and, upon seeing himself thus photographed, he was seized with one of those solitary, puerile frights which cut audacity's gigantic wings with a single stroke.

He glanced about him; in the alcove lined with dark paper, a curtain moved softly, impelled by the air. Turning around, he threw himself upon it quickly, drew it back, and then, laughing at his infantile fears, went towards a large walnut bureau in the farther end of the room. On top of it the small valise lay open and extended, and in the top bureau drawer, which was locked, and the key of which he had in his pocket, was his travelling note-book. He took from it the large official letter, and laid it upon a night table in the centre of the room.

At this moment steps resounded in the corridor outside, and Jacob ran quickly to the door on tiptoe, listened a moment, and with as little noise as possible turned the key in the lock. He then selected from a small travelling toilet-case a tiny instrument with tortoise-shell handle like a nail file, with a very fine, sharp blade, and set to work most carefully to heat it in the flame of the fire.

Still he hesitated a moment, glancing again in all directions, and listening attentively to the distant murmurs of the Boulevard, — blasts of folly and pleasure which scaled the windows. He finally decided. With great dexterity he introduced the heated blade beneath the seal of the official document, and, turning it slowly around, loosened the wax so entirely and so intactly that it could be stuck on again without the slightest sign of fracture. Afterwards he placed it, with great precaution, upon a sheet of white paper on a corner of the night table.

The mysterious document was open, and Jacob, with avidity not exempt from fear, began to inspect it. Inside was a letter in Italian, not very long, in the same large and running handwriting as the address, and signed by Victor Emmanuel. There were also two other large blank envelopes, sealed with the device of the Free-masons, a compass and a square crossed in the form of a pentagraph, upon green sealing-wax.

Jacob turned them over on all sides, without the slightest sign of surprise, and with the same dexterity and swiftness

as before, pulled off the seals from them both. The first contained a large sheet of paper, very closely written, its paragraphs in the form of articles marked with Roman numbers, which were also jotted down on the margin, in the same large handwriting of the letter and the address. Jacob read all attentively, but without surprise, as if the subjects of which they treated were known to him. Only upon perusing the last articles, in which the name of the Marquis of Sabadell was mentioned, a jesting smile flitted across his lips, while he murmured: —

"Ah, rogue!"

Finally came the turn of the last package, which was the most voluminous. He opened it with great circumspection, as an edge of the envelope had become fast, and immediately two other blank documents fell out, and also a third, upon which was written a name that made Jacob start and mutter one of those gross exclamations common in moments of anger or surprise even to persons who are supposed to be cultured. He was stupefied; his heart beat, his knees shook under him, and he turned the papers over and over again with the timorous eagerness, and pleasurable terror, if it is possible to feel such, of the weak mannikin who suddenly finds within his hands the fabulous riches of a formidable giant, which he must not let escape him. Twice he glanced furtively towards the door, as if he feared to see it open, in spite of the key which fastened it on the inside.

He had here a veritable arsenal of compromising letters and papers, most important on account of the names which signed them, and perfectly arranged and classified, in a sort of enclosed memorandum, in which a very facile pen had stamped interesting data and important observations. It was a treasure of great value and a formidable lever, which, well managed, could in a short time ruin all the revolutionary politicians who honey-combed Spain. They were letters of exchange payable at sight, which any one could collect in influence or in money.

Jacob devoured them all, line for line, and word for word, passing through all the emotions of surprise, fright, rancor, hope and suspicion, plunging both hands in his curly head of hair, and pressing the cranium as if to prevent his attention from being distracted, while grasping some of these papers between his trembling fingers, as if he wished to feel they were his own, that they belonged to him alone, and that no one in the world had a right to deprive him of them. At times he stopped and closed his eyes for an instant while his respiration seemed forced, and he breathed with difficulty. When he had finished reading he was pale, and the vague and timid look with which he glanced about him expressed the mistrust and fear which makes every criminal believe, even in the midst of a desert, that prying and scrutinizing eyes are upon him.

He then arose and began to pace up and down, making gestures of fear and joy, childish and insane pirouettes; standing before the mirror as if he wished to question his own image; stopping before the candelabrum to catch the drops of sperm which trickled down the rose-colored candles, and squeezing them between his fingers into balls, with a reflective, imposing, and menacing attitude. Presently the light seemed to annoy him, and he blew out all the candles with a breath. Immediately afterwards he threw the window wide open and leaned out. The cold was intense, but the ever crowding Paris multitude defied it, thronging the boulevards between torrents of light without stopping a moment, and never resting, — like a reprobate soul condemned by God to an eternal feast.

Among the eddies of this multitude and the thousand various hues of lights of all colors and reflections which made the boulevards resemble the fantastic scene of a fairy dance, Jacob saw only one thought and one plan, whose first outlines became more and more twisted at every instant, crowded out of place by opposite ideas, unexpected inconveniences and well grounded fears, which made him hesitate, groaning with vexation like a capricious child deprived of

a sweetmeat, or roaring with rage like a caged lion, whose prey is snatched from him. And all was caused at the thought of having to return these documents, of not being able to keep them to use to his own advantage, and of having to be the mere instrument instead of the principal actor. For how could he reply to the terrible proprietor's reclamations? How avoid the suspicion of this robbery, done by a burglar doubtless, but a robbery none the less. How, in fine, prevent the terrible and inevitable vengeance which would follow the discovery?

Among the thousand ridiculous masquerades at which he had laughed so many times in the lodges, something terrible and menacing then stood out in his imagination, which took a sensible form in that mysterious word, which he had always pronounced mockingly and which he now recalled with fear, —

"*Neckan!*" "Vengeance!"

It was necessary to act with prudence, to reflect and weigh, measure and decide without delay. As if he hoped to find in movement some of those ideas which suddenly occur to one upon turning a corner, or which gush forth in the midst of a stream, he rushed out into the street, after first securing all the papers in the bureau under lock and key. He walked along the Boulevard des Capucines, turning into Boulevard de la Madeleine, presently traversing the entire Royal Avenue, and afterwards wandering through a labyrinth of unknown streets, returning to the hotel at two o'clock in the morning, exhausted, worn out, without having thought or decided upon anything. For Jacob was one of those irresolute, as well as audacious men, in whom reflection, far from smoothing the way for the understanding which plans, or holding by the bridle the passionate will which runs riot, only succeeds in entangling the first in intricate imaginings and in exasperating the second, until suddenly and without warning it breaks loose at last, when the time is least opportune and prudence least advises it. His was one of those characters which in general are

impetuous and impatient, acting more from impulse than from reason, and taking for realities the perspectives of the imagination, upon which they erect strong castles whose only cement is air.

On the staircase, clinging to the balustrade, an old man was going up limping, enveloped in a long and ample mackintosh, capable of preserving an Arctic explorer from the cold. This apparition seemed to Sabadell to be Uncle Frasquito in person, and he began to run quickly up the steps with the idea of overtaking him. But the old man, upon perceiving that he was being followed, ducked his head in his great fur collar, and speedily concealing in the pocket of his great-coat something which he held in his hand, promptly entered the room contiguous to Jacob's. The latter started, surprised and suspicious, and doubting that it was Uncle Frasquito, also entered his own room. At one end of it was a little door cut in a partition dividing into two one single room, and secured with a double bolt on either side. Jacob approached it on tiptoe, and listened attentively. He heard his neighbor strike a match and lock the hall door. He then heard approaching the frail, little door, soft steps which the carpet did not altogether smother, and a slight sliding of the bolt on the opposite side. Startled, Jacob stepped back, scarcely drawing his breath, and casting a rapid glance at the bureau which contained the papers, drew out from his pocket a six-barrelled revolver. His neighbor was spying upon him, and in his heated imagination he already saw the traitor Mason, with the poniards of all the lodges of Italy directed at him, resolved to reclaim their precious deposit. Meanwhile the bolt creaked anew, his neighbor was either drawing it out or securing it, and as it was natural to suppose it drawn, he might well suspect he intended to try the door. The latter, varnished with great care, did not contain the slightest hole or crack through which one could see.

The light steps resounded again, retreating, and Jacob drew nearer with his revolver aimed, and his ear attentive.

Presently came a suspicious cough; it was not the dainty perfumed and cadenced cough of Uncle Frasquito, but the asthmatic cough of an old man, which, like certain peculiar creakings, predict in old houses their speedy ruin. Another strange noise increased his uneasiness. He heard a slight metallic silvery knock, similar to that of a dagger's blade, grating with precaution against a crystal or marble surface; and afterwards at intervals and for a long time, a muffled noise of something being rubbed with rapidity and dexterity. Perhaps the old man was sharpening the point; perhaps he was poisoning it!

For a while there was complete silence. Then the light steps were heard moving about in different directions, they turned again towards the door, the friction of his suspicious, spying neighbor being heard behind it, and later on, as the hotel clock struck three, a thud was heard similar to that of a heavy body which falls upon a spring mattress, and afterwards a prolonged sigh and yawn, which set Jacob at his ease. No one who is going to commit murder begins by yawning.

Tranquil now, although still suspicious, he laid the revolver on the table and, with the delight of the miser who reviews his treasures, lost himself again in the reading and examination of the papers. Suddenly he sprang again from his seat startled, and grasped his revolver. In the adjoining room had resounded a violent leap, precipitate footsteps, various knockings on the door, and then an infirm and agonizing voice, which shrieked out in Spanish: "Help! Help!" Then he heard a groan, and then again the voice cried in French: —

"Au secours! Au secours!"

CHAPTER XV

Uncle Frasquito returned to the Grand Hôtel that night in an extremely bad humor. He had endured for two hours the aristocratic tedium of the Cercle de l'Union, the masculine *sanctum sanctorum* of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to which so few strangers can gain an easy *entrée*, and which is, for that very reason, the coveted object of all the illustrious fops. Our neighbor's chicken always seems a turkey to us, and to yawn in company with the Montmorencys and the Rohans is not without its charm, even for those who are accustomed to yawn in unison with the Osunas and the Medinacelis. Uncle Frasquito was wont to complain frequently of tooth-ache, and he took advantage of this occasion to display his whole jaw with a dolorous gesture, exposing to view a magnificent set of teeth, clean, white, and even as the keys of a piano, for which Ernest, the famous dentist of Napoleon III., had charged him ten thousand francs. He then deplored having to suffer such acute pains with such a sound set of teeth, and took very good care not to add that these same pains had their origin in a certain overlooked jaw-tooth, his only real one, existing there in the confines of his gums like a mile-stone in the middle of a desert.

Upon his exit from the Cercle, the cold air caused a slight throb in the fossil tooth, and, startled, he hastened his steps to reach the hotel as quickly as possible, in order to take gargles of elixir which would save him from a sleepless night. When half-way up the stairway he glanced about in all directions very cautiously, and not perceiving a living soul who could surprise his secret, quickly took out the set of teeth and wrapped them in his handkerchief. This relieved him immensely, but disfigured him so that his face looked like a burlesque caricature of itself. Uncle Frasquito's room was on the fourth floor, and upon reaching the second landing he noticed with surprise that some one was following him

up the stairs. He quickened his pace, startled, and glancing out of the corner of his eye discovered the Marquis of Sabadell, who was coming up the steps two at a time, doubtless trying to overtake him. Great heavens! what a hurry he was in! He buried his head up to the eyebrows in his great fur collar, quickly put the set of teeth in his pocket, and started on a run until he reached the door of his room, breathless.

"Perverrse fate!"

Sabadell followed him without stopping, and finally paused at the door of the adjoining room without daring to approach him, but looking at him from head to foot, amazed, attentive, and suspicious.

"He has seen everything," thought Uncle Frasquito, "and to-morrow all Paris will know I have no teeth!"

Oppressed with this idea, he entered his room hurriedly, struck a light, and ran to secure the little communicating door on the inside, fearful lest his importunate neighbor should spy out his secrets. The latter, in fact, seemed to harbor perverse intentions, for Uncle Frasquito distinctly heard from the other side of the partition strange noises, which disturbed him and made him nervous. The little door, however, did not offer the slightest treacherous crevice through which one could peep, and this somewhat relieved him. He took his gargles of elixir, the tooth-ache vanishing completely. He then began to clean his set of teeth, rubbing them with a silver screw-handled brush, which, striking against the glass or marble of the wash-stand, produced a metallic sound. This operation finished, Uncle Frasquito began to relieve himself of his accessory components in order to retire; but beforehand, on tiptoe and in his shirt-sleeves, he made a third exploring tour to the suspicious little door. His neighbor seemed quiet, and Uncle Frasquito began his return trip, taking long, silent strides and humming very softly, with childish satisfaction, the strain from the *Daughters of Eve*: —

> "Tranquil is the mart;
> Not even a mosquito is heard."

With great precaution he took off his perfumed wig, and quickly put on a nightcap of pyramidal form, terminating with a small tassel, a simple and majestic *casque à mèche*, like those recommended by Jérôme Paturot to his clients, as being worn by Victor Hugo. It is well known that the *bonnet de nuit* is a venerable social institution among the French, and levels all heads, as in former times they were levelled by the knife of the guillotine. Philip Augustus and the last of the Albigenses looked as much alike in the shadow of the former as did Robespierre and Louis XVI., centuries afterwards, beneath the knife of the latter.

Uncle Frasquito took a good half hour entirely to undo himself, and when finally enveloped in his long night-shirt he let himself fall upon his bed, one would have said that the Uncle Frasquito, about to retire, was the cube root of the Uncle Frasquito who, padded and made up, exhibited himself everywhere. By the light of the candle which was burning upon the night table, he began to read, according to his custom, one of Vizconde d' Arlincourt's novels, in order to sooth himself to sleep. He liked the romantic style, and sometimes would pass whole nights, like a lad of fifteen, commiserating the sorrows of some Clarissa, or participating in the endearments of some Adolphus. His first sleepy nod made him knock his nose against the night table, and the book fell upon the floor. He leaned over, however, to pick it up, as the chapter was interesting and he wished to finish it.

Shortly afterwards a strong odor of burning linen reached his nostrils, causing him to sit up with a start, fearing the risks of a conflagration. He glanced about in all directions; nothing could he discover anywhere of the devouring element. Nevertheless, he continued to inhale the offensive odor, which continued with increasing pungency. He thrust his head outside of the bed curtains, looked under the pillow, between the blankets, and in the china match-safe on the night table. Nothing, absolutely nothing! Perhaps some article of clothing had fallen in the fireplace, — a sock, or a handkerchief.

Uncle Frasquito, very much alarmed, sprang out of bed and ran to the fireplace. Nothing! The fire was burning moderately, and the thick metal fender which enclosed it prevented any coal from escaping.

"How singularrr!"

Perhaps it was in his neighbor's room, or in the corridor outside; or perhaps the inflammable miasms of some large fire on the boulevards had penetrated through the walls. Uncle Frasquito ran first to the outside door, then to the communicating door, and lastly to the window, his nostrils distended and sniffing continually, without discovering the slightest indication of fire, but perceiving that the more he moved from one side to the other, the more marked became the alarming odor.

"But in Heaven's name, what is burning? If it does not seem like some trick of magic!" thought Uncle Frasquito, standing in the middle of the room in his night-shirt, his arms crossed, his neck distended, and directing to the four corners of the apartment his dilated nostrils and wide-open eyes.

It seemed to him then that he felt an alarming heat on the top of his head, and he glanced up at the ceiling. Nothing there either! He turned around rapidly, and a cry of fright escaped his lips upon seeing himself face to face with a looking-glass. In it was reflected his eccentric figure, enveloped in the long *robe de nuit* and crowned with the nightcap, on the top of which was sparkling a tiny red flame! Great heavens! the fire was there!

Fear never reasons, and the fright which Uncle Frasquito got prevented him from understanding that the little tassel of his cap had caught fire from the candle when he leaned over to pick up the unfortunate book. The poor old man then completely lost his head, rushed to the electric bell, and ran to the door calling for help, lastly pounding on Jacob's door crying afresh: —

"Au secours! Au secours!"

The little door was then violently thrust open, and Jacob

appeared in it, revolver in hand. It was impossible for him to recognize Uncle Frasquito in this apparition, and Jacob did not realize who it was until the phantom, extending its open arms towards him, exclaimed in anguish: —

"Jacob! Jacob!"

The latter, without understanding anything as yet, as a preliminary proceeding gave him a slap on the head, and the burning cap fell to the floor, leaving exposed a bare, clean skull, white and relucent as a winter melon. All this was a grotesque, farcical scene which occurred in a moment, and yet this small and ridiculous incident of life sealed Jacob's fate forever.

The servant on that floor, answering the bell call, knocked at the door of the room; Uncle Frasquito then saw the absurdity of the situation, and more and more agitated quickly put on his wig, enveloped himself in a fur cloak, put in his teeth, and took refuge in Jacob's room, saying to the latter, in a voice half crying and half supplicating: —

"You answer, Jacob! Don't let them see me!"

It was now that suddenly, from amidst the thick mist of fears and perplexities which enveloped Jacob's mind like an ocean fog, paralyzing his natural audacity, a luminous spot broke forth. Uncle Frasquito was rich, influential, had the *entrée* everywhere, and this ridiculous adventure would put him completely in his power, taking into consideration the effeminate weaknesses of the presumptuous old man. The crooked lines of his plan at once began to straighten themselves out, and an idea formed itself in his mind, vague as yet and indecisive, but already visible like the cocoon of the silk-worm through its silky floss.

He dismissed the servant, excusing Uncle Frasquito by saying he had had a false alarm. The still burning cap he extinguished in a basin full of water, opened the window a little to renovate the air, and returned promptly to his room, where Uncle Frasquito was awaiting him. The latter, calm and already at his ease, was ensconced in the arm-chair close to the fire. When Jacob entered he was examining

attentively, with the air of a connoisseur, the three wax seals torn from the letters by the traitor Mason, and left in his fright upon the table. The papers were well secured beneath lock and key, in the bureau at the end of the room.

"What a senseless fright!" exclaimed Uncle Frasquito upon seeing him; and wishing to lessen the absurdity of the scene by not giving it any importance, he immediately added: —

"What seals are these? I do not know them."

Uncle Frasquito collected diplomatic seals, as we have already seen, and had an album of curious samples, which he had bought at very high prices. Some days before, he had paid two hundred francs for an antique wax seal of Yakoub Almanzor, which had stamped upon it in Arabic letters this beautiful device: —

"Let God judge Yakoub, as Yakoub has judged."

"The crrown is Italian: rrroyal crrown upon the Savoyan crross," pursued Uncle Frasquito. "I have one of Victor Emmanuel's which is identical; but these I do not know."

Jacob, embarrassed, upon seeing in Uncle Frasquito's hands this flagrant proof of his attempted crime, did not answer, and the old man, turning the two green seals over on all sides, asked again: —

"Whose are they? Do you want them?"

Jacob, more and more embarrassed, in order to say something answered: —

"Can you not guess?"

"Ah! indeed!" suddenly exclaimed Uncle Frasquito; "I should think so! The compass and the square, with the little branch of acacia in the middle. How stupid of me! This indeed smacks strongly of lodges!"

Jacob burst out laughing forcedly, and Uncle Frasquito, with the ardor of an amateur who stumbles across a good thing, added enthusiastically: —

"Give them to me, Jacob? I have none, and they are most curious. I suppose you have no use for them. At least I shall take one."

A most strange and at the same time a most common thing in characters like Jacob's! For four hours he had been battling with himself, without daring to decide upon anything, and suddenly in a moment, with only six words, he burnt his ships behind him and sealed his fate.

"Take all three, if you like," he said shrugging his shoulders.

Alea jacta est! The seals once given up, it was impossible to restore them to their places, and return the papers, keeping a copy of them, as had been his first intention; and he was now obliged to run the risks of this audacious crime, it being already too late to retreat. Uncle Frasquito did not wait for him to repeat his offer; he wrapped the seals most carefully in the paper in which he found them and put them quickly in his pocket, as if he feared Jacob might withdraw his gift. The latter watched him with a strange smile, and when the terrible bit of paper vanished in the old man's pocket, murmured in the Turkish language: —

"Olsum!"[1]

Then, rising quickly, he proposed to Uncle Frasquito that they order a bowl of hot punch. The latter excused himself under pretext of the lateness of the hour; but Jacob, with affectionate and expressive words and a certain melancholy air which sat very well upon his manly beauty, urged him to stay. Would he deny him this moment of relaxation? He was so sad, so dejected, so alone in the world.

Uncle Frasquito looked at him amazed, and curiosity, which is the most powerful force of resistance known, fixed him to his seat. Perhaps he was going to clear up the mysterious x of his incognito appearance, which they had all been discussing that afternoon on the hotel terrace, and which Jacob's untimely presence in Paris, abandoning his legation in Constantinople, had called forth. Uncle Frasquito remembered having learned in the Imperial College, some fifty years before, the following from Horace: "Fecundi calices qui

[1] Amen. — Tr.

non fecere disertum!" and the punch was accepted with suppressed enthusiasm.

Horace was not mistaken, after all. Jacob began his confidences *inter pocula*, speaking slowly, in a very low voice and at intervals, like a man oppressed with trouble, who distils through his lips, drop by drop, the bitterness which inundates his soul. He was crushed with a weight of remorse, a frightful catastrophe, of which he had been the involuntary cause, obliging him to flee from Constantinople with his heart broken and his conscience stained with blood. Uncle Frasquito gave a start, opening wide his small eyes, and Jacob silently bowed his head between his hands, looking fixedly at his empty cup.

"Why, man! this is most serious!" murmured the old gentleman, frightened; and as he saw that the other prolonged his silence, he aroused him by saying: —

"It is doubtless a question of petticoats."

"Or of pantaloons, which is the same thing in Turkey," replied Jacob.

Then suddenly pulling himself together with the violent effort of a man who casts far from him a weight which is crushing him, he related in all its details the terrible history of the Cadi's wife, Sarahi. Uncle Frasquito listened with his mouth open, gradually shrinking into the arm-chair and convinced of his own littleness, as the novelty and the terrible nature of the situation made a giant in his imagination of the hero of this legendary adventure, whose first confidant he was, and whose future chronicler he hoped to be.

At the thought of being the first to cast to the four winds of publicity this tragic adventure, Uncle Frasquito began to swell in the arm-chair, until he was shoulder to shoulder with the hero, as the shadow vies with the body, the echo with the music, Homer with Achilles, and the immortal Virgil with the divine Æneas. And to think it was already too late to run from house to house that very night to tell the news!

Jacob read in Uncle Frasquito's *babieca* face what he was

thinking, and could not suppress a smile of triumph upon seeing his first purpose accomplished. On the following day the history of the Cadi's wife would be the talk of all Paris, gloriously justifying his flight from Constantinople, and surrounding him with that aureole of novelty, of absurdity, and of the impossible, which is the highest pedestal upon which the public of illustrious simpletons who live in search of novelty can place their idols of the day.

Well did Jacob know this public, and also that a single day was sufficient and more than sufficient to establish himself firmly upon this new basis, on which his plans were grounded. He wished, however, to make things sure, and rising without saying a word went to the little open valise on the bureau, fumbled about a bit, and finally threw upon the night table in front of Uncle Frasquito a small object, saying: —

"The only souvenir of my oriental idyl!"

It was a kind of slipper, but a slipper remarkable for its small size, — of white satin, with tip embroidered in gold, and laces of swans' feathers fastened with emeralds; an artistic treasure, cut without doubt to fit the foot of a fairy, and made rather to hold jewels and trinkets on a lady's toilet-table than to confine a human foot. Uncle Frasquito was astonished, feeling himself become very small again, like the little man Charles Stratton, who could bathe in a punch-bowl; and pictured Jacob as high up as the Napoleon of the Vendôme column, who from his great height could only see the tops of men's heads. An irresistible desire took possession of his soul, but stopped on the tip of his tongue, timid and respectful. He would have given his most precious jewel, even his set of teeth made by Ernest, to possess for only twenty-four hours this souvenir of the Cadi's wife, to pass it around through all the drawing-rooms and show it to all those most interested, thus acquitting himself of a *bout de rôle* in this novel tragedy, which the following day would be the theme *par excellence* of every conversation. All Paris would hasten to prostrate itself before the exotic slipper,

and he would be the chief priest to exhibit the relic to the crowd of novelty seekers. And as if Jacob read in his face this desire, and from the height of the column of honor upon which the old man had placed him deigned to grant it, he presently said: —

"Uncle Frasquito, do me a favor."

"What?"

"Keep that slipper."

"What do you mean, man!"

"Yes! yes! Take it, and never let me see it again. For me it is a sad souvenir, and for you a curious *bibelot* which you can keep on your dressing-table!"

"But my dearrr Jacob! I don't know if I should —"

"Yes, you should, man, of course. Here you have Cinderella's slipper; the day you find a wife whom it will fit, that day you can return it to me."

"Then it is mine forever," replied Uncle Frasquito, enchanted. "I do not imagine that anywhere, but in Turkey, women's shoes are made of lily leaves."

Uncle Frasquito at last bade Jacob good-night with the greatest demonstrations of affection, and no sooner found himself alone in his room than he began to inspect closely the little slipper, concluding by putting it up to his nose. He withdrew it instantly, however, with a gesture of disgust, not finding there that suave Smyrna perfume, mixture of aloes and incense, which he imagined must be left wherever the foot of an odalisque might choose to repose. Far from this, it smelt badly, very badly, and Uncle Frasquito screwed up his mouth and turned up his nose; it had a very strange smell, like a mixture of untanned hide and half-rotten paste.

He then examined the sole, and it was as clean and new as if it had never been brought in contact with the floor, nor suffered the slightest pressure even of the nimblest swallow. Hum! What if, after all, this Jacob was a first-class impostor, who had deceived him with a string of lies? And cogitating thus, Uncle Frasquito remained for a long time in a brown study, looking attentively at the sole of the slipper,

as if he would question the Sphinx. Finally he shrugged his shoulders. After all, even though the relic should prove a false one, and should have as much to do with the Cadi's wife as his trousers had to do with the Grand Turk's, still he would lose nothing by it. "Se non è vero è ben trovato." He had seen greater deceptions pass muster throughout the world!

Suddenly he remembered something of the utmost importance, and hastened to Jacob's door, giving discreet little taps. The latter, with his jesting smile stereotyped on his lips, was occupied at that moment in secreting in the farthest corner of the valise the companion slipper to the one presented to Uncle Frasquito. The history of the Cadi's wife was true; but the slipper he had bought at the Grand Bazar through a mere caprice, from one of those old Turks of impassible countenance, glass eyes, enormous turbans, and orange-colored caftans, who even now in modern Constantinople recall to mind the times of Bayaceto and Soliman the Magnificent. Uncle Frasquito poked his head through the door, saying timidly: —

"Jacob! Jacob! I beg pardon, but I think it is better to say nothing of what has happened."

"And what is that?"

"Why, man, the fire, and the cap."

"Ah! Of course; I had forgotten all about it."

"Quite natural! A most absurd affair! but, you know, people are so foolish; they laugh so at everything and always throw one into ridicule."

"Be easy, man, be easy. To whom should I repeat such follies?"

"Good-night, then, Jacob. Excuse me. If anything occurs, knock on the partition. I sleep like a bird. In this I am like an old man."

Uncle Frasquito finally retired very well satisfied, thinking of the morrow, but upon extinguishing the light, this time with great precaution, he had a cold chill of fright. It seemed to him that the shadows in the middle of the room were surg-

ing, and floating upon them was the strangled eunuch with the halter around his neck, his eyes starting out of their sockets, his step slow, and his hand extended cold and stiff, which, gradually stretching towards him, pulled him by the nose.

Uncle Frasquito covered his head with the sheet, closed his eyes tight, and crossed himself hurriedly three times.

CHAPTER XVI

The contest of feminine beauty which first took place in Spa, and afterwards in Buda-Pesth, awakened in the Countess of Albornoz the happy idea of making the reputation of her own beauty circulate through the whole of artistic and civilized Europe. It was a real misfortune that she should have been born an Albornoz, as, had her name been less illustrious, she would have gone at once to the capital of the ancient kingdom of the Estebans and Vladimirs, to dispute the prize of beauty with Cornelia Szekely, the laurelled Hungarian.

Not being able, therefore, to win it in person, the idea took possession of her to gain it in effigy, to accomplish which she had her portrait painted by Bonnat, the masterpiece to be sent afterwards from exposition to exposition, so that through means of photography and the engraver, not a corner of the earth should be left in ignorance of the fact that the Countess of Albornoz had, as Diogenes expressed it, soft-boiled eyes. Nevertheless, she, in the morbid excitement of her self-love, believed them capable of realizing the dream of Alexander and Napoleon, of subduing the universe. This transcendental idea detained her in Paris until the month of November, and three times a week she deigned to pose for the good of humanity in the great artist's studio. The picture was to be finished for the next exposition in Vienna, and the little caprice cost her the trifle of forty thousand francs. Doubtless very dear, but for what had God given her the money?

That morning Currita had sent a message to Bonnat not to expect her, as she was obliged to accompany her Majesty the Queen to the Expiatory Chapel on the Boulevard Haussman. The Grand Hôtel clock had already struck eleven, and Kate, the English maid, fastened with two large gold pins to Currita's head the very rich Spanish-lace mantilla, with which the lady proposed to distract the few persons who would assist at the requiem rites of the unfortunate Louis XVI. The Duchess of Bara had already sent her maid to tell Currita that she was waiting, so they could go together to the Basilewsky palace ; and Currita, nervous and impatient, asked Kate if the Marquis had not yet returned.

"No, madam," replied the girl.

"But what time did he go out? How is it he is up so early?"

"He did not go out."

"How is that?"

"Because he has not been in since last night."

"Ah!" exclaimed Currita.

And gazing at herself in the mirror, she arranged with the utmost care a little red curl, which prudently concealed upon her forehead a lot of freckles. The Duchess of Bara, tired of waiting, went in search of the lazy one.

"Why, Curra, what are you about? If you don't hurry, the Queen will be kept waiting."

"My dear Beatrice! It seems you do not know the lady. It will be twelve o'clock before she leaves the Royal Chamber." And observing that the Duchess's mourning toilet was also completed by a Spanish-lace mantilla, she exclaimed with great glee : —

"My dear! we have both had the same idea! How delicious! *Les grands esprits se rencontrent.*"

"To represent Spain, one could not go in any other way. What I regret is, not having thought of the fan."

"Well, yesterday I bought one expressly. Look, it is not bad. Do you want one like it? Kate will bring you one at once. I got mine at the Compagnie Lyonnaise, just around the corner."

The Duchess before the prospect of a fan, gratis, felt her haste diminish. It was a very pretty fan of dark smoked-pearl on a ground of black silk. Kate would pay for it at the store, and she would assuredly forget to pay Kate back; for in these matters of paying, the Duchess was a very absent-minded person. Kate, upon leaving the room, announced that the Marquis had returned.

"Excuse me a moment, Beatrice," exclaimed Currita, quickly. "I want to say good-bye to Fernandito." The Duchess made a gesture of intimate complacency at the conjugal tenderness of her friend.

"What a pair of turtle-doves!" she said. "I assure you, you make me envious."

And Currita, with a pathetic intonation, answered from the doorway: —

"Really it is a favor from Heaven not to have had, during fourteen years of married life, a single disagreement."

Fernandito had just arrived, and in truth his features did not bear indications of having been at his prayers. The collar of his great-coat was hanging down, his shirt was rumpled, there was a dent in his hat, and his eyes were red and swollen, while his breath emitted a strong odor of stale wine. He was very much surprised and perturbed at the sight of Currita, and with the forced smile of the scholar who covers a prank with a lie, he said: —

"I have just come from seeing the cannibals, in the Jardin des Plantes."

She with tender solicitude exclaimed, very much alarmed:

"*Mon Dieu!* Fernandito, I am very much afraid of those things! Are they at large? Do they bite?"

"Bah! no! They are like any other negroes, only uglier."

And he buttoned up with much dissimulation the collar of his great-coat, in order to conceal from Currita the fact that his consideration for the cannibals had led him to the point of visiting them at ten o'clock in the morning, in evening dress and a white tie. She with her dove-like sim-

plicity did not remark this, and hastened to ask with adorable ingenuousness: —

"Did you attend to my commission?"

"What commission?"

"How delicious! Did I not tell you to go and see Jacob Tellez?"

"Jacob Tellez? And who is Jacob Tellez?"

"Jacob Sabadell, of course, man; the husband of my cousin Elvira."

"Ah! yes! I thought his name was Benito."

In Currita's light eyes glittered a lightning-flash of wrath; a little more and she would have lost her meekness.

"Although his name were Polycarp," she exclaimed, "is that any reason not to do what I tell you?"

"But, my dear, I forgot all about it. What must be done?"

"Go this very minute! Do you understand? And invite him to breakfast. Be sure that on my return I find him here with you."

"Very well, my love, don't worry. It shall be done. Did you say his name was Benito?"

"Enough of Benito! His name is Jacob, and he is a most distinguished man, whom I wish you to consider as my cousin, which he is."

Currita discoursed a moment upon family love, and the imperious duty of every citizen to cement these venerable ties, and leaving Fernandito quite convinced, she went to rejoin the Duchess. As both ladies were entering the carriage, Uncle Frasquito, very sprightly, exquisite, and resplendent, appeared, hurriedly making signs for them to wait for him. He got into the carriage with them, took a curious little pasteboard box out of his pocket, and placed it upon his knees. The ladies looked at him astonished, he smiling wickedly the while. Finally he raised the lid mysteriously, and between two pieces of perfumed silk paper was revealed the small slipper. Meanwhile Jacob, without leaving his room in the Grand Hôtel, was turning his proj-

ect over in his mind. Clearness of judgment is in direct ratio to the convenient distance from which one contemplates actions, and upon awakening that day, free from the perplexities and anxieties which had tormented him, he could appreciate his situation with perfect exactness. The lines of his plan now appeared clear and firm in all their contours, in the same manner as, when the waters retire after an inundation, the height of the hills, the extent of the plains, and the depth of the valleys become distinctly visible. Jacob then found that his hills were mountains, his plains deserts, and his valleys abysses.

And the worst of it was that the first abyss which yawned at his feet, and which it was absolutely necessary for him to span, he had himself opened with his own hands the night before, by heedlessly staking everything upon a single card, forgetting that his game of cards was double and complicated. For the slipper bought at the Grand Bazar and Uncle Frasquito's folly would that day place him on the top of scandal's column, that glorious pinnacle of fashion, which this time was erected upon the corpses of two degraded beings, — one killed with a halter, the other stabbed and before having expired thrown, in a leather sack, alive and palpitating, into the depths of the Sea of Marmora. But from this column, whence one can dictate laws to the world of pomp and scandal, one only succeeds in inspiring contempt and invincible repugnance in that other world, not less small, but less known, of honor and virtue; and it was just in this silent and hidden world that the person was to be found whom at all costs Jacob needed in these circumstances. But who would now stem the course of the current? Who would stop Uncle Frasquito, slipper in hand, scouring the streets of Paris in search of a bit of celebrity, of a single little ray from the hero's aureole.

It was necessary to strike into another path, and chance threw into Jacob's way one who would point it out to him. This was Diogenes, who hastened to see him very early in the morning, attracted, like the buzzards at the odor of dead

flesh, by the money which he thought the Plenipotentiary must have brought. Diogenes was not like Sabadell, who never forgot his rôle of *grand seigneur*, and spent in pompous show and caprice just as freely when times were good as when they were bad, with the single difference of paying in the former, and not in the latter. Diogenes, on the contrary, lived in a modest *maison meublée*, and daily seated himself at the first table he found, without waiting to be invited, through a certain assumed right which his small amount of self-respect guaranteed, and through a constant tradition which inveterate custom had converted into written law in the canons of Madrid society. When he had money he squandered it magnificently, and when he had none, he borrowed it with the always fixed determination of never repaying it, according to his favorite maxim: "Collect and don't pay; we are but mortal."

That morning he had decided to breakfast with Jacob, and take him afterwards to the Petit Club, to try his luck with George, and with the deliberate intention of getting in some fine work on the way. His surprise, then, was great when Jacob, with the austerity of a St. Paul, first hermit, and the fortitude of a St. Anthony in the desert, refused absolutely to leave the hotel, saying that he had sworn he would never again tread the impure streets of Paris, that never again would he take a card in his hand, and that, as it was not convenient for him now to go to Madrid on account of the political change, he had decided to leave the next morning for Biarritz, where he was going to attempt a reconciliation with — *Polaina!* — with his wife!! Diogenes listened to him in silence, looking at him from head to foot; his eyes, swollen from continual drunkenness, finally fixed themselves upon Jacob's. When the latter finished speaking, he said to him very seriously: —

"Nonsense! You talk like the gypsy in the fable: 'Lord! all ask for their daily bread; I only ask to be put where there is bread, and I will take care of the rest.'"

"I don't understand you."

"Well, I will speak more clearly. You say: 'My wife has gained her lawsuit with the Monterrubios, and has an income of thousands. I am hungry like the prodigal son; so I will go there and eat the fatted calf.'"

Jacob was very much annoyed upon hearing his thought so faithfully expressed, in part at least, and with an air of offended dignity exclaimed: —

"I assure you —"

"Jacob, my boy! I can tell a cripple by the way he walks!"

"I tell you —"

"And I know the wool I am carding, Jacob!"

"You can think what you like; but I —"

"If children wish to deceive their elders, they must take the consequences. Look, child; neither you nor I have any self-respect; but to be a rogue, the first thing necessary is talent, and while you are on the way, I have been and returned. Understand?"

Jacob's rebellious dignity seemed to be much appeased, and after a moment's silence, he asked: —

"According to that, then, my plan appears to you absurd?"

"Absurd? For you it is a round business; for her a highway robbery."

"And you think that Elvira —"

"Would let herself be robbed? Certainly! For you to raise your little finger is enough for her. For she loves you, man, as much now as the first day that you deceived her. It seems incredible."

"Well, what then?"

"What then? You will have to proceed to headquarters."

"And where are headquarters?"

"My dear boy; at Father Cifuentes'."

"Ah! I have already been told so."

"Well, you have not been deceived."

Jacob remained for a moment thinking, and presently, scratching his head lightly, added with his jesting smile: —

"Then I suppose it would be necessary to confess to Father Cifuentes?"

Diogenes became serious.

"Look here, Jacob," he said. "Do you see me? I am a jester, a drunkard, a lost one; I have done everything but commit murder. But, understand, I respect all that has any reference to God. I respect all because I inherit that respect. *Polaina!* I have imbibed it with my mother's milk. I am not good, because I don't want to take the trouble to become so; but I venerate him who does take the trouble, and who is good. And not because I deserve punishment do I fail to acknowledge that there are those who deserve glory, nor because I wallow in the mire do I cease to see that there are stars in heaven."

Jacob listened astounded at the strange sally of Diogenes, who pronounced his harangue with his large mouth drivelling, and striking at intervals either his breast or the table.

"And why all this outburst?" asked Jacob, finally.

"Why? So that you will leave your wife in peace, for by only thinking of her you injure her."

"Well, you are complimentary! A most valiant paladin of my little Elvira! And where did you become acquainted? I suppose it was not in Father Cifuentes' confessional."

"Certainly not. I have seen her, and have known how to appreciate her, at the house of Maria Villasis, who is her intimate friend."

"So she is the intimate friend of your intimate friend Maria Villasis? Now I understand. And how is that perfect widow, as the Duchess of Bara used to call her? I suppose you must have experienced with her what the Chinese pugs experience, who from pure ugliness are attractive. And my wife is no doubt your confidante?"

"Stop there, *canaille*, or I will break your head!" exclaimed Diogenes, thrusting his formidable fist up to Jacob's very nose. "What do you want? Money? Well, there is the Countess of Albornoz, a poor lot, like yourself, who will give you all you want. What difference does it make to you to be called Jacob, or Monsieur Alphonse?"

Jacob was really annoyed this time, for never had he heard such a bitter truth. He controlled himself, however, because he knew how terrible were the assaults of Diogenes, and with a forced smile answered: —

"My dear Diogenes, you have not entirely recovered from yesterday's debauch. In whose head but yours, I should like to know, would originate the idea that I was going to sell myself to my wife for a handful of dollars?"

"My friend, when there is no more to be had, it is well to answer like the other gypsy of the fable. He confessed he had stolen three pesetas, and the priest said to him: 'Are you not ashamed to condemn yourself for three miserable pesetas?' 'And what would you have me do,' answered the gypsy, 'if there were no more to be had?'"

Here the dispute was interrupted by the Marquis of Villamelon, who came in, completely restored from the ravages of the morning. Diogenes, upon seeing him, quickly seized a newspaper and began to read near the fireplace, on the opposite side of the room. The Marquis went straight up to Jacob, who arose ceremoniously to receive him, and squeezing both his hands, said to him very affectionately: —

"My dear Benito, how are you? You, always so popular —" And with patronizing affability, he gave him two affectionate little taps on his left shoulder.

"I beg pardon for not having come to see you yesterday, Benito," pursued Villamelon, seating himself. "But in this Paris, you see, there is no time for anything. Curra is expecting you to breakfast, you know, at two o'clock; a little late perhaps, but to-day she is engaged with the Queen. Understand?"

He offended Jacob's pride with his patronizing airs of hero of the *navo-terrestre* combat of Black Cape, and Jacob wished coldly to decline the invitation, but Villamelon stopped him, saying: —

"Not a word, not a word! Understand? I do not admit excuses, Benito; and Curra would be mortally offended,

you know. She has a weakness for your family, and raves about yourself. She is always talking about Benito, — Benito here, Benito there."

Diogenes shouted from his seat: "Villamelon! Man! I mean, idiot! his name is not Benito!"

"Ay! it is true. What was it? How is it?"

"Jacob."

"That's it, — Jacob. Excuse me, Jacob, but I have a most unfortunate memory, and the worst of it is that every day it gets weaker and weaker." Fernandito complained with good reason of his lack of memory, fatal symptom at times of softening of the brain. But Diogenes, who let no opportunity escape him of discharging his terrible thrusts, began to recite as if he was reading from the paper: —

> "Speaking of a certain history,
> A fool was asked:
> 'Do you remember?' and replied:
> 'Wait until I search my memory.'
> My Agnes, seeing his idiocy,
> Said at the moment, smiling:
> 'Search your understanding as well;
> It will cost you no more.'"

Jacob and Villamelon looked at each other, and afterwards at Diogenes, then again at each other, and burst out laughing, Fernandito saying finally: —

"What an original! There is nothing to do except to kill him, or to leave him alone. Understand, Benito?"

CHAPTER XVII

Uncle Frasquito's legs would carry him no further, and he tried in vain to invent something similar to Churruca's feat at Trafalgar, when the latter, deprived of one of his legs by a cannon-ball, continued to command the combat from the bridge of the vessel, standing in a barrel of bran. Oh! how

dreadful it would have been if this had happened to him twenty years ago, when in a single day he had made sixty-nine visits, in order to be the first to announce the famous marriage which enlisted little Louis Bonaparte, Count consort of Teba, in the number of his nephews!

And the worst of it was that, when at four o'clock in the afternoon he returned to the Grand Hôtel, exhausted and discouraged from not having been able to show to more than two thirds of the Spanish colony the apocryphal slipper of the Cadi's wife, he found that this tragic history had a sequel, most interesting as well as pious, devout, sentimental and romantic, in which it fell to his lot to be, not only the chronicler, but the powerful agent, efficacious intercessor and key-keeper of Providence, as Diogenes would have put it, in the beautiful finale of this drama, which commenced its action in the Sultan's beard and would terminate beneath Father Cifuentes' cassock. Uncle Frasquito called to mind Mathilde and Malek-Adhel, and became very much affected, his emotion causing him a violent fit of coughing, which he was obliged to soothe with three marsh-mallows. For Jacob had come to him again to ask his help, and had opened to him the most hidden recesses of his heart.

It was very singular what had happened to him, and in vain he had tried to explain it to himself. The night before he had tossed and tumbled in his bed, uneasy and wakeful, seeing file before him in his mind's eye the thirty-three years of his life, laden with pleasures, adventures, and endless worries, flowers without scent, enjoyments without remembrance, and follies without happiness, which produced in his soul the same impression of repugnance which the remembrance of sumptuous repasts produces in the surfeited and undigesting stomach.

Uncle Frasquito listened to him, gaping and attentive, imagining he saw, breaking forth in Malek-Adhel's passionate heart, the mysterious dawn which reformed the hearts of Rancés and Mañara. But Jacob, suddenly abandoning the sentimental tone of his peroration, asked him in prosaic

prose where his wife Elvira was at that time. Uncle Frasquito's face wore a disgusted expression, as if he was about to see Malek-Adhel exchange the white turban for the high hat, or as if he had been made to jump from one of Mme. Cottin's pages to one of the "Stranger's Guide."

"Elvirrra?" he answered. "I really don't know, but she must be in Biarritz. Yesterday Lopez Morreno's wife said she had seen her."

Jacob remained for a moment silent and pensive, and Uncle Frasquito, bursting with curiosity, hastened to add, very obligingly and officiously: —

"But if you want certain information, I know a person who can enlighten you."

"Who?"

"Father Cifuentes."

"Why, man! Do you know Father Cifuentes?"

"Of course I do! He is my nephew; half-brother on his mother's side to the Countess of Vegallana. He is the son of Tonito Cifuentes, who was Assistant Secretary of State in Izturriz's time, and took orders when —"

"But is he also in Biarritz?"

"No, he is here in Parris, — in the Rrue de Sèvres. He has not been in Spain since '68, except *en passant.*"

And with a certain delicate suspicion, he added timidly:

"Do you wish me to see him?"

"No! I want to see him myself."

Uncle Frasquito gave another emotional start, already seeing Malek-Adhel in the act of founding a convent like Rancés, or a hospital like Don Miguel de Mañara. Everything would turn out the very same, the identical same as in *La Favorita!* Ferdinand, *la bella del Re*, and friar Baltazar. The convent alone was wanting, and he, anxious to lay the corner-stone, hastened to say: —

"Well, I will take you to him when you like."

"To-morrow, then."

"Agrreed!"

Uncle Frasquito, cautious, however, and wishing to warn

the novice of the deficiencies which Father Cifuentes might have in his rôle as Baltazar, hastened to tell him that the former was a poor unfortunate, with not an iota of good form about him, who spoke opportunely and inopportunely of hell, picturing such ugly and unpolished little devils, who had n't the slightest resemblance to the correct, perfumed, and elegant little devils, whom Uncle Frasquito pictured in evening dress with white ties, curly hair, gardenias in their button-holes, monocles in their left eyes, and little bows of flame-colored ribbon on the tips of their tails.

" For, to tell you the truth," he pursued with an air of intimate confidence, " I am verry much of a Catholic, verry much of a believer, but as far as the clerrgy are concerrned, they leave much to be desired everrywhere. Not a single prriest can be found who knows how to underrstand us well, who knows how to mould himself to our way of living, or to the way of thinking of ourr set. This verry Father Cifuentes, the otherr day, at the interrment of Generral Terrcena, wished me good-afternoon, my boy, and trried to convince me that I had to die also, and that it was necessarry to preparre one's self and to meditate upon eterrnity. In fact, my boy, he rreally afflicted me! And as forr poorr Pepita Abandon, you have n't hearrd about it? Well, it was atrrocious, and most crruel. Such a good girrl, so elegant, so charritable, who neverr had but one loverr, Paul Verra, which all Madrid knew about and sanctioned, and even herr own husband was awarre of. Well, my boy, not so Father Cifuentes. Paul fell ill, and Pepita of course went in all haste and established herrself at his bedside. Father Cifuentes was notified and answerred that he could not enterr that house until Pepita should firrst leave it. Think of being so exacting! She rrefused, of courrse, and Paul also; and notwithstanding everything that was done to convince the good but unwise man that it was crruel to separrate them, and that everrybody would crriticise her abandoning him in his last hour, all was ineffectual and in vain. He was as stubborrn as an Arragonese; put his hands in his sleeves and rrefused absolutely, leaving him

to die like a dog. And that, too, when they were on the point of asking the blessing of his Holiness; but all was useless."

"I warrn you of this," pursued Uncle Frasquito, raising his finger, "forr if you arre thinking of consulting him about any — vocation, or of confessing — "

"I confess?" exclaimed Jacob, very indignantly. "What put that idea into your head?"

"As you said you wished to speak to him — "

"Is n't Father Cifuentes the confessor and intimate director of my wife?"

"Yes, cerrtainly."

"Well, what I wish to exact of him is that he will oblige Elvira to accede to my wishes."

"But what arre yourr wishes, Jacob?" asked Uncle Frasquito, very much alarmed.

"They are very simple and very Christian, — to be united again to my wife, and to forget the past."

"Aaaah! — Yeees!" exclaimed Uncle Frasquito, stupefied and disconsolate upon seeing the convent without foundation, the hospital unfinished, and the novice without taking the veil. And irritated and furious that the legend of Malek-Adhel should have the commonplace dénouement of any Moorish comedy, he allowed himself to be carried away by his tell-tale spirit by saying: —

"But have you considerred well yourr wishes?"

"And do you think them, perchance, impossible?"

"Impossible? no, man. But do you know the life Elvirra leads?"

"I was just about to ask you."

Uncle Frasquito made two or three squeamish faces, apparently of distress, and answered, hesitatingly: —

"I will tell you, Jacob. It is quite a public thing; but I don't know if I should."

"Why should you not, Uncle Frasquito?" exclaimed Jacob, violently and irritably. "I have the right to ask, and if you are my friend it is your duty to answer me."

"Of course I am yourr frriend, Jacob; do you doubt it? And I was the frriend of yourr fatherr also, and of yourr grrandfatherr. That is to say, I knew yourr grrandfatherr when I was but a child. But there arre cerrtain things —"

"But what things? Speak out, man; speak out!"

"Well, then, Jacob, the truth is yourr wife has been the cause of a grreat deal of comment everrywherre."

"Really?"

"Yees: I am verry sorrry to tell you, but it is quite trrue. She is *déclassée*, my boy, completely *déclassée*. All Madrrid has given herr the cold shoulderr, and she is only on frriendly terrms with my niece, Maria Villasis, who is of the same calibre. But at least the latter is a woman of spirrit, — spends money, and makes a noise."

"But what is it that Elvira does?"

"Horrrorrs, Jacob! horrrorrs! From the time she separrated frrom you she has not been seen anywhere; neither at the theatre, norr at a ball, norr at the Castellana, not even a Sunday in Montijo's house. Carrmen Tagle had a maid who once lived with herr, and such things that she told! that she was always afterr the serrvants, because to-day was a fast-day, to-morrrow a churrch day, or the day after a day of abstinence. In fact, that she was insufferrable, that nothing stopped herr. And as forr herrself, what absurrdities! They say she sleeps upon a low bench, lives upon brread and water, and, following the example of I don't know what pious monk, used to scourrge herrself with a cat.[1]

"How atrocious! — with a cat? But that is impossible!"

"Well, my dearr boy, they say it is quite trrue. You cannot imagine how we laughed, one night at Carrmen Tagle's house, discussing the question. Some thought it must be a dead cat; in which case I also could chastise myself, just as I might with a featherr dusterr."

[1] In the life of the Ven. Father Eusebio Nieremberg, it is related that he used to chastise himself with one of those instruments like iron hooks called *cats*, and it was without doubt to this *cat* and to this illustrious pious monk that Uncle Frasquito alluded.

Jacob seemed to become perfectly tranquil upon hearing the horrors which Uncle Frasquito related to him, and cut short the thread of his discourse by saying: —

"Bah! If it is nothing more than this I can easily restore her to her senses."

Uncle Frasquito was going to reply, very much disgusted, but Jacob stopped him by asking: —

"How does Elvira live? Does she spend much?"

"Hum! She might as well be the widow of a suspended government official. She is thin and emaciated, — she whose figurre was once so grraceful and elegant. In fact, my son, one day I saw herr at Marria Villasis's house, and she looked to me to be absolutely slovenly. As if to be a saint it is necessarry to become a pig, when cleanliness is a virrtue which can be prractised with frresh waterr and a sponge. Of her own house I can tell you nothing, for I have not seen it; thrree times I called there out of curriosity, but she neverr received me. However, she lives in a verry modest aparrtment, in the neighborrhood of the Carbonerrras."

"This is not strange; the poor thing must be rather badly off."

"Hum! don't believe it. But have n't you hearrd? Why, she is rrich, — has gained the lawsuit with the Monterrubios, and must have at least fifteen orr twenty thousand dollarrs' income."

"Well, I am very sorry for it, man!" exclaimed Jacob, regretfully.

"Not rreally?"

"Of course really; for she being richer than myself, there will be no lack of evil tongues who will attribute to personal interest my reunion with her."

"Oh! no, no, Jacob! Don't say that, Jacob; whoeverr thinks such a thing can't know you."

"Well, we 'll see. What is of the most importance at present is that I come to an understanding with Father Cifuentes."

"Well, if you like, we 'll go to-morrow."

"Without fail."

Uncle Frasquito, resigned to the classical turn which the legend had taken, arranged with Jacob the hour when, on the following day, they would make the transcendental visit, the repentant spouse being anxious to start for Biarritz as soon as possible. The protector and the protégé finally took leave of each other, and the former, in order to spread the news to the public without loss of time, ran straightway to dress himself for his nocturnal rounds, afterwards going down to the hotel terrace, where all the Spanish colony were awaiting as usual the arrival of the mail.

Neither the uncertainty of new misfortunes in the mother country, nor the thousand rumors which circulated through their adopted country, succeeded in distracting the general conversation from the novel history of the Cadi's wife, whose apocryphal slipper they had all gazed upon, after some prudent precautions which Uncle Frasquito judged indispensable for the *mise en scène*. For, fearful lest some suspicious soul should doubt the authenticity of the ornament, he hastened, before exposing it for public veneration, to rub the sole on the floor, so that it would appear to have been used, and to obliterate with rich essences that overpowering smell of new shoe which the night before had awakened in his nostrils such dangerous doubts.

The Duchess of Bara had not as yet found a favorable opportunity to make a critical analysis of the political-religious function at which she had assisted some hours before; and even Lopez Moreno's wife, the dethroned Queen of Matapuerca, had for the moment forgotten the signal honor which awaited her the following day. The Duchess had announced to her that her Majesty the Queen had deigned to receive her, and in the same breath, as one who is not much interested, had asked an extension for the payment of those small items which for several years she had been owing.

"Certainly! Suit your own convenience!" the generous creditor had answered.

In the same breath also, and as one also not particularly interested, she had fired this matrimonial shaft, with an inquiring smile: —

"Lucy and Gonzalito (the Duchess's first-born) are enchanted to be together. What a delightful pair they make! To-day they have gone to the skating-rink, as Gonzalo is teaching Lucy to skate."

The Duchess caught the hint on the wing, and answered with a polite smile which covered this thought: —

"You are very fresh! Any day you choose, you will endorse the girl as daughter-in-law! A Duchess of Bara, *née* Lopez Moreno! God help us!"

Currita, for her part, preserved that afternoon a solemn silence, born of the rage of two thousand demons which danced within her. Jacob had slighted her breakfast with the frivolous pretext that he was obliged to rest after his journey, and she had discharged her wrath upon the defenceless Villamelon, who, seated behind her in a pensive attitude, consoled himself for his wife's harshness by thinking of hobgoblins, and distracted his imagination with vivid recollections of his visit to the cannibals. Leopoldina Pastor made noise enough for a hundred, proposing to relate to Octave Feuillet the history of the Cadi's wife, so that he might write an Oriental tale, and lamenting the fact that Jacob Sabadell did not put in an appearance anywhere; all of them waiting impatiently to pay him their just tribute of admiration, which his novel adventure inspired, and which would be so different from the cold reception they had tendered him the evening before.

Uncle Frasquito then appeared on the scene, dressed in gala costume and laden with perfume and news, which, as the bubbles announce the boiling of the water, his countenance announced with a significant and expansive smile. Jacob's unexpected resolution caused a profound sensation in the auditorium; and when Uncle Frasquito declared that the hero expected to leave for Biarritz possibly the following day, two persons, Diogenes and Currita, could no longer

control themselves. The first rose from his seat and walked straight up to Uncle Frasquito, as if he would like to strike him, and the second, whose violent anger was not noticeable otherwise than by a strange vibration in her sweet little voice, began to pour forth injuries and vituperations against the Marchioness of Sabadell, her much beloved cousin, to the great astonishment of Villamelon, who still remembered the little sermon on family love to which he had listened that morning.

The feminine contingency echoed Currita's vituperations, and all agreed that the Marchioness of Sabadell was an *intrigante*, a hypocritical devotee, and a bad wife, who, having stood upon her dignity for ten years, among priests and acolytes, now wished to throw a gloom over poor Jacob by placing him under the guardianship of Father Cifuentes, and that it was a question of conscience and an imperative obligation for every faithful Christian to snatch the mask from the hypocrite, and to warn the unthinking man of the snare which was laid for him. Diogenes, when half-way up to Uncle Frasquito, seemed suddenly to decide to spare him his life, and vigorously attacked the feminine host, saying that they were like a gypsy's curse: "From female tongues you will know yourself!" — and that whoever said "woman," said "devil," for the race was of such bad breed that every insect, even to the chinches — *Polaina!* — were females.

Everybody present laughed heartily at Diogenes' idea, and he, more to annoy than to please them, then related that God had not made our Mother Eve from Adam's rib, but from the tail of a monkey;[1] for, although the former had been his first intention and he already had the rib in his hand from which to form the being destined to be the cause of

[1] This story and the following are very ancient tales popular in Andalusia, gathered by the author, and invented by the wit, at times profound, of the peasants of that land. The very simplicity of their style, the manifest innocence and at the same time mischievousness of intention, exclude from them all other irreverent idea.

so many misfortunes, a monkey, who was watching him attentively, suddenly snatched the bone and ran to hide it in his den. The Lord pursued him and caught him by the tail, but the monkey pulled so hard that his tail came off in the Lord's hands, who shrugged his shoulders, and said: "For what I am about to do, one thing is as good as another." And from this strange utensil was formed the mother of the human race.

There was a great outcry from the ladies at Diogenes' story, and Currita, fearful lest, in the explosion of her wrath, she might have allowed something to escape her which it was to her interest to have left unsaid, hastened to follow up the joke by saying: —

"Well, see here, Diogenes, perhaps your story may have something of truth in it, for I have heard one very similar respecting the formation of man. They say that God had already created all the animals, but had not as yet created man; it was very late and he was tired, so to save time and work, he seized hold of the first insignificant little animal which crossed his path and said to it: "Look here, you, speak!" — and man was made.

And as Currita said "speak," she gave a little tap with the tip of her fan upon the shoulder of her beloved spouse the Marquis of Villamelon. The latter, interpreting the signal as a sign of reconciliation, smiled contentedly, sweetly, and joyfully, while Currita leaning towards him whispered very softly in his ear: —

"Listen, Fernandito. It seems to me quite natural that you should go and see if Jacob has rested and invite him to dinner. Tell him I shall expect him without fail, because I wish to speak to him about something of interest to him."

At this moment the arrival of the mail was announced, and Diogenes took advantage of the natural commotion which this caused, to approach Uncle Frasquito and seize him unceremoniously by the open lapel of his rich fur coat, which exposed to view an immaculate shirt-front, in the centre of which glistened, beneath his white cravat, a most

exquisite turquoise, blue as the heavens. Uncle Frasquito was terrified upon seeing himself alone and defenceless in Diogenes' clutches, and tried to conceal his fears by receiving him humbly, smilingly, and affectionately, calling him Perriquito and offering him rich cigars, which he himself never smoked, but always carried about him in case of an emergency. But Diogenes, fixing upon him his eyes swollen from rum and ginger, with the malignant influence of the serpent which fascinates the unwary little bird, asked him with very bad manners, after an imperious "Look here, Frasquito!" if it was true he was in league with Jacob.

He in league with Jacob! What an idea! Why, it was this verry Jacob who was annoying him even in his verry room, for Heaven only knew what rreason. It was trrue he had asked forr an introduction to his nephew, Father Cifuentes, and he of courrse, to be rrid of him, had given him a carrd; but who could have imagined he was going to accompany such a crazy fellow, or mix himself up in family affairrs, or intrigues of bad odor?

And while Uncle Frasquito was speaking he disengaged, little by little, the lapel of his coat from Diogenes' hands, until, finally releasing it, he promptly buttoned up his great-coat to the very chin, thus putting out of reach of any of Diogenes' assaults his snow-white shirt-front. Diogenes, leaving him in peace, again asked: —

"And when does Jacob go to Biarritz?"

"To-morrow night." And in a mysterious manner and a tone of intimate confidence he added: "Of courrse, Jacob is only attrracted by the powerr of the Monterrubio millions which Elvirra is enjoying to-day. I wonder what she will do. For no human being can imagine a girrl so good and saintly wishing to rre-establish a *ménage* with that Pontius Pilate."

Diogenes turned his back upon him without asking further questions, and Uncle Frasquito, delighted to see himself free, at the sole sacrifice of betraying his friend, hastened to notify Currita that Diogenes took the Duchess of Sabadell's part, and to deplore with the Duchess of Bara the

fact that the correctional police could not put a stop, either in Spain or France, to the outrages of this cynical old man. The latter had left the terrace by way of the reading-room and entering a small adjoining room had seized pen and paper and in a very strange handwriting began this letter:

"My dear Maria, — "

Here Diogenes stopped short, and scratching his nose with the end of the pen, seemed very much perplexed, until he finally added to the above, this reverential ending, "much respected."

"To-morrow that rascal of a Jacob Tellez, who has the stamp of Cain upon his brow, is leaving here for Biarritz and intends nothing less than to attempt a reconciliation with his poor wife Elvira. He has escaped from Constantinople, where he has committed I know not what atrocities, and obviously has discovered that Elvira has money, and wishes to save her the trouble of keeping it. To-morrow, before leaving, he will have a conference with Father Cifuentes, in which Francesca di Rimini will serve as his *tercero*." [1]

Here Diogenes noticed that something was not in harmony, and added: —

"— or as *tercera*. I advise you of all this, in case you may be able to do something for that poor girl, who would be capable of giving herself up completely to that rogue of a husband, if there is no one to warn her. If I can be of any assistance, even to breaking Jacob's neck — "

Here Diogenes again paused doubtfully, not knowing with certainty whether Jacob had one or more necks, and doubtless disposed to break as many as he had, finally continued: —

"— let me know and I will be there. I am still travelling with my sixty-two years on my back, journeying towards that hospital bed which so many times you have predicted for me. I wonder if I shall reach there when I am sixty-three?"

[1] Third, or go-between; *tercero*, masc., *tercera*, fem.

And finishing his letter with this question, he signed it as Antonio Perez used to sign his to Milady Richs : —

" Your whipped cur, madame,

" Diogenes.

" P. S. A kiss to Monina."

Here he stopped again perplexed, slowly shook his great head, and his pimply face took upon it an indefinable expression of tenderness and sadness.

That little Mona, a beautiful little creature four years of age and the idol of his heart, by a phenomenon similar to that which makes big dogs play with children, used to pull him by his whiskers and make him walk on all fours, guiding him by the ear ; but one day she had spurned a kiss from his alcoholic lips, by saying with infantile repugnance : —

" No ! it smells bad."

And Diogenes, the cynical Diogenes, who ridiculed the opinion of the whole world and even boasted of frequenting the most indecent places, felt before this angel's repugnance that a great shame had invaded his heart and mounted to his forehead, tinging it with crimson and filling his eyes with tears. For three whole days he did not touch a drop ; on the fourth he again surrendered to the vice, but never tried to kiss the child again. And now, even at this great distance from the little girl, he felt culpable in writing the word " kiss " in this postscript, and effaced it with big blots, writing in its stead, " Tell Monina I will bring her a doll which says ' papa ' and ' mamma.' "

Afterwards he addressed the envelope to —

" Mme. La Marquise de Villasis,
Villa Maria,
Biarritz."

CHAPTER XVIII

A Queen's caprice made, in a short time, out of a small, forgotten hamlet, one of the most noted centres of fashion among the demigods who regulate their customs, their luxury, their necessities, and even their consciences at times, by the extravagant laws of this capricious tyrant. The Empress Eugénie erected in Biarritz La Ville Eugénie, and Biarritz was placed upon a level with Trouville, Dieppe, and Étretat. The Spaniards invade it in the summer, the English in the winter, and the Russians in the autumn, as if they all wished to enjoy by turns its rather problematic conveniences and its very questionable charms. Luxury hastened to erect there villas and palaces, and speculation ran up hotels and casinos. Only piety remained with her hands folded. In Biarritz churches are at a discount.

On the high-road to Bayonne, near the sea-side, is a delicious villa, nestling in a diminutive park like a dove in its verdure nest; the grounds run parallel with the road, and are enclosed by a large double iron gate, upon each side of which is the inscription "Villa Maria." This opens into a large avenue, which, shaded by magnificent trees, makes three capricious turns, crosses a tiny stream, and leads to a semicircular plateau filled with flowers, a charming square, which serves as a garden of honor to the house. Three white marble steps give entrance to the lower floor, used solely for visitors, and adorned with the charming simplicity which adopts all that is beautiful, and rejects all that is sumptuous, and which constitutes good taste and elegance in the decoration of a country mansion. In the lower part of the vestibule opens the door of the drawing-room, through which one reaches a small adjoining cabinet, hung with cretonne, figured in large copper-colored flowers. At one end of the room was a white marble mantel-piece, and at the other a large glass window thrown wide open, which let in

floods of sunlight and permitted the view of the green park, with the beach farther on, and the blue of the sea in the distance.

The clock in the little tower of the villa had already struck eleven, and two ladies, seated on either side of the fireplace in the small room, were conversing. One was weeping silently, and the other seemed to be consoling her. The latter was over forty years of age, and her absolute lack of "make-up" plainly revealed the silent march of time. A simple shell-comb bound her abundant masses of hair, almost completely white, and her rich gown of figured cloth with velvet trimmings, far from lending the slightest charm to her person, seemed rather to receive from the graceful and noble figure of the lady the severe elegance of its cut and folds. Her complexion somewhat dark, and her features far from perfect in outline, had nevertheless that mobile beauty of expression which is the same with respect to the physiognomy as color is to drawing, — beauty more correctly moral than physical, which always escapes the painter's brush, and which constituted the principal charm of this lady, endowed as she was with a certain natural vivacity which did not exclude self-control, and a certain spontaneous and affectionate grace which, added to a very slight lisp, proclaimed her Andalusian origin.

The other, very much younger, seemed depressed and in ill-health; her pale countenance formed a perfect oval, and her eyes and mouth attracted attention from their sweetness and sadness of expression. The former were large and blue, with a vague and somewhat exalted expression, as is that of hope in the midst of grief; the latter was pallid and drawn at the corners, with that curvature which indicates habitual suffering, and is the first sign which agony stamps upon hopeless invalids and those condemned to death. She had on a dark hat without a veil, a long cloak of otter fur, and a little muff of the same skin, in which were hidden her gloved hands.

This lady was the Marchioness of Sabadell, and the other

was her intimate friend Maria Villasis, in whose house she was. The mail that morning had brought to the two ladies important news; the Marchioness of Villasis had received Diogenes' letter and a long and detailed letter from Father Cifuentes. The Marchioness of Sabadell, for her part, had found upon her return from mass a letter which made all the sensitive fibres yet existing in her heart vibrate; for a moment the unhappy woman thought she was going to swoon.

Ten years had elapsed since she had seen Jacob's handwriting, and even before glancing at the envelope that something peculiar and mysterious which, in certain circumstances, makes the heart beat, and suddenly fixes the mind upon a remote and forgotten period, gave her warning of the authorship of the letter. She entered her bedroom, reeling, drank with a trembling hand a swallow of water, and let herself fall unnerved into an arm-chair, gazing at the letter which she held in her hands, without daring to open it.

The entire past suddenly surged into her mind, like one of those large billows which burst upon the shore, completely effacing the foam of other, smaller waves. Those brief days of happiness passed before her, when, madly in love with her husband, she had thought herself in possession of happiness, the false object of life, and had forgotten the true object, which is God. This was her only fault, — the fault of ungrateful children, which the immense majority of the human race incur; forgetting God in their happiness, and only remembering him in their grief, — it better suiting their egotistical condition to pray for help than to return thanks for favors received. Well did she now realize it, and well was she expiating it!

Soon came trifling infidelities and small disenchantments, suffered without reproaches and pardoned without restriction, which did not succeed in overthrowing the idol from this enamoured soul, which was like a gentle river free from tempests, or like an æolian harp, upon which even the howling of hurricanes was transformed into sighs. Afterwards came greater offences, and, little by little, the terrible dis-

coveries of tremendous vices, which broke forth like monstrous eruptions beneath the seductive aspect of this adored husband, whose depraved inclinations, indomitable passions, dissolute habits, and innumerable defects, were born and lived in his soul like loathsome worms in putrid flesh. The idol became a monster, and the unhappy wife tried to tear it from her outraged heart, as one discards all that offends or stains or dishonors; but her soul clung to him, full of anguish and shame, for the idol was always standing, always reigning within her, and, although monstrous, was none the less an idol.

Finally came ruin and abandonment, long days of solitude, vain waitings for a letter, a thousand times answered before being received; anticipations of his appeal for pardon, granted in advance. Finally came the agony of awakening day after day to find herself again alone in the arena of the combat of grief, asking herself, like the unfortunate Dauphin of France of his mother, Marie Antoinette, "Is to-day still yesterday?" For her, yesterday was always to-day, and the idol was always an idol!

And now, when, after so many years, this letter stirred up that turbid wave of crushing afflictions, poignant sorrows, terrible offences and black ingratitudes, solitary tears and despised sacrifices, the unfortunate wife felt the love for her husband rising in her heart, always alive, strong, and enslaved, resisting neglect, disdain, insults, and even absence itself, living without hope to maintain or nourish it, and for that reason as immortal as the soul itself. The poor woman was afraid of herself, and a bitter flood of tears gushed from her heart. She thought of her son, whose guardian angel she was, intrusted to defend the interests of his education against his own father; and she feared that this passionate love would be the weak spot in her heart to cause her to stipulate with the enemy, who, like the vicious plant which draws the life from all those other plants which surround it, appropriates to itself the sap which vivifies, refreshes, and gives luxuriant growth.

At the farther end of the room was an exquisite painting of the Holy Family, hanging over a very simple *prie-dieu*, and upon this the Marchioness sank, weeping bitterly, to read at the Virgin's feet the unexpected letter. Jacob, without p eliminaries of any kind, informed his wife of his approaching visit, to discuss with her important business, whose arrangement, which filled his humbled heart with hope and comfort, had been advised by Father Cifuentes, an excellent person whom he had met in Paris. The Marchioness thought she could not have understood aright this last part of the short letter, and read it over and over again. Hypocrisy was the only vice she had never observed in Jacob, and either this letter was overflowing with it, or God had worked in him one of his miracles. Could it be that that heart, whose cold egotism preserved it always frigid and insensible, like a corpse between layers of snow, had been comforted by Father Cifuentes's hopes and consolations? This of course was absurd, but it was possible; for the last twelve years it had been her daily prayer, her most ardent petition, and oftenest repeated supplication; and God was so good, so great, so fatherly!

Although something hard and inflexible sprang up in the bottom of her heart, crying out that all this was but a farce and a new villany, the Marchioness drowned the voice without heeding it, in order to admit a ray of sunlight within her breast, which would dissipate the shadows of her sad abandonment and allow hope and desire to erect at their pleasure a beautiful castle in the air. Without thinking of her breakfast, or delaying longer than necessary to bathe her weeping eyes at her toilet, Elvira hastened to the Marchioness of Villasis's house, deluding herself with the idea of seeking prudent counsel in the clear understanding and pure affection of her friend; but in reality seeking something which, with the authority of the latter, would give encouragement and foundation to her hope.

The Marchioness of Villasis well knew how to act, for Father Cifuentes in his letter had given her a detailed account

of his interview with Jacob. The latter had presented himself, concealing beneath his petulant arrogance the uneasiness and the species of suspicious fear which the Jesuits generally inspire in worldly people, who only know them through the thousand and one fictions which circulate in their favor or against them. But upon seeing before him this little man, almost vulgarly insignificant in person, plain even to carelessness in his speech, who never took his hands out of his sleeves except to help himself to a pinch of snuff from his horn snuff-box, or to display with deplorable frequency a bandana handkerchief of blue and yellow plaid with little green dots, his uneasiness was converted into contempt, and with the disdainful coldness which the proud maintain towards the humble, whom they imagine to have been exalted upon a usurped superiority, he evinced his desire to be reconciled with his wife, and to forget the past, and expressed his wish that the priest himself should be the one to advise his abandoned wife to accede to his wishes. And now it was that Jacob was convinced that Father Cifuentes was a poor unfortunate, without an iota of good form, as Uncle Frasquito had previously told him.

The Jesuit's hands receded more and more within his sleeves, and very much pleased and satisfied, he opined that nothing was more in accordance with Christian morality than family peace and the pardon of injuries. But — and here the horn snuff-box again appeared, to minister to Father Cifuentes a powder worthy of the Great Frederick — as for his advising her Ladyship the Marchioness to accede to the wishes of his Lordship the Marquis, his Lordship must take into consideration that her Ladyship had not consulted him in the matter, and the first requisite of prudent advice was that of being asked for it.

Jacob opened his mouth to reply, but the blue and yellow plaid handkerchief with little green dots was again exhibited, and Father Cifuentes added that he believed, had understood, in fact it seemed to him probable that the Marchioness of Sabadell was about to leave Biarritz, and that in the event

of his not finding her, the most prudent and best thing his Lordship could do would be to see the Marchioness of Villasis, a very great friend of his, a woman of great intelligence and greater virtues, to whom he would take the liberty of giving him a letter of introduction, asking her to interest herself in the matter.

Uncle Frasquito, who with a great lack of delicacy, born of his vehement desire to follow the intricacies of the drama, had constituted himself a witness of the conversation, now broke in upon it by declaring that this was an excellent idea, that his nephew Father Cifuentes was most decidedly right, and that the best thing for his nephew Jacob would be to consult his niece the Marchioness of Villasis, without delay; for what the latter could not obtain from his niece Sabadell, no one in the world, nephew or no nephew of his, could do.

Jacob considered for a moment the plan proposed to him, and finally deciding to write at once to his wife, in order to stop her departure by the news of his approaching visit, accepted in any case the letter for the Marchioness of Villasis, and took leave of Father Cifuentes, calling him Don Gregorio. During the whole course of the conversation he had avoided with marked affectation calling him Father, addressing him continually as Señor Cifuentes.

Señor Cifuentes accompanied the aristocratic pair to the door, with his hands as usual hidden in his sleeves, and, upon seeing them disappear within the carriage, permitted himself to murmur to his cassock, concerning his uncle and his uncle's nephew: —

"Exact allegory of the world! Folly protecting vice!"

Without losing a moment, he at once began a letter to the Marchioness of Villasis, giving her an inkling of Jacob's plans, which exactly coincided with those already given by Diogenes, begging her to prevent at all costs a meeting between Elvira and her husband, so that the latter might not again deceive her, and also advising her with great earnestness to banish forever, by some resource of her feminine

ingenuity, this good-for-nothing husband, who proposed to despoil his unhappy wife, to the serious injury of his innocent son. The Marchioness of Villasis took good care not to inform Elvira of all this, and like the expert physician who dilutes an over-strong beverage in various doses, thus changing poison into medicine, she began to undeceive the unhappy woman little by little. The letter which Elvira, trembling and agitated, handed to her she read attentively and returned without a word. The latter questioned her with her sad eyes full of tears, and the Marchioness of Villasis then said, shaking her head slowly: —

"I would n't believe him on his oath."

Elvira bowed her head, crushed, for these words seemed to destroy with a blow the castle which hope and desire had previously erected in the depths of her heart. Two large tears coursed down her cheeks, while she murmured timidly: —

"I have prayed so much! and have wept so much!"

"It is true. But he has lied so often, and has gone so far!"

"God can work a miracle."

"And man can render it useless."

"I hope not."

"I fear so."

"But how do you know?"

"And what reason have you, Elvira, to think so?"

Elvira's grief then found vent in sobs, and as if this trouble was new to her, she felt, in all its fulness, the first necessity of all weak persons in misfortune, that of finding some friendly arms in which to throw herself, or some loyal breast upon which to hide her face wet with tears.

The Marchioness of Villasis received her in her own arms, strained her to her heart, and kissed her upon the forehead, whispering to her with the gentle and affectionate voice which one uses in speaking to a disconsolate sick child. She, still sobbing, moaned: —

"What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Leave Biarritz."

"But where shall I go?"

"To Lourdes, to wait there near Our Lady until the storm passes."

"But he will follow me!"

"He will not; I will take it upon myself to stop him."

"But what if it should be true, Maria?" Elvira said, still clinging to her hope. "What if his repentance should be sincere, and the poor man should find the door closed upon him?"

"In that case I shall know it, and will myself bring him to Lourdes. We will all three follow you, your husband, your son, and myself."

"Ah! little Alfonso! Poor child of my heart! What must I do with him? Take him with me?"

"No; leave him at the College."

"Ah! no! no! that would be too much," cried Elvira, beside herself. "What if his father should go there to see him, and should take him away from me? Child of my soul, to be without him! — it would kill me, it would kill me!"

And before this idea which terrified her, the unhappy woman, overcome by grief and weakness, suffered a slight swoon. The Marchioness made her swallow a cup of bouillon and a generous glass of wine, and finally succeeded, little by little, in tranquillizing her. They then arranged their plans; Elvira would leave that very night for Lourdes, accompanied by Mlle. Carmagnac, a very estimable woman, who had been governess to the Marchioness of Villasis's only daughter. She then dictated a letter for Elvira, to be delivered to Jacob when the latter should present himself at his wife's house; in it she said that very urgent business prevented her from waiting for him in Biarritz, and that the Marchioness of Villasis was empowered to arrange with him business matters of whatsoever nature, Elvira agreeing in advance to whatever they might both decide.

The Marchioness of Sabadell assented to everything with

that species of moral inertia which enervates the will when, in any business of life, faith is extinguished, and hope dies. But in heroic natures, strength increases with the pain of sacrifice; and without now shedding a tear, or showing herself to be either depressed or afflicted, she busied herself solely in the preparations for her journey. The two ladies breakfasted together at the Marchioness of Sabadell's house, the latter giving over to her friend some important papers which the Marchioness of Villasis wished to have at hand, in case they should be necessary in her conference with Jacob. Both ladies then left for Guichon, a small village situated between Bayonne and Biarritz, where the Jesuits, expelled from Spain by the Revolution, had opened the College which little Alfonso Tellez was attending.

Elvira took leave of her son, without saying when or where she was going, and the rector of the College, who well knew all the lady's troubles, was charged to permit no one to see the child during his mother's short absence, except the Marchioness of Villasis. Two hours afterwards, the latter took leave of Elvira at the Negresse station and returned, sad and thoughtful, to Villa Maria, giving orders that she would receive no one. She shut herself up early in her room, and passed the greater part of the night in looking over and studying Elvira's papers, writing a sort of document in the form of numbered articles. The following morning she arose very early and repaired to the chapel of St. Eugénie, heard two masses and devoutly received communion; the prudence of the woman had made its calculations the night before, and the faith of the Christian now went to seek in the sacraments the divine grace necessary to conquer in the struggle.

The morning was superb, and promised one of those splendid winter days in which the blood tingles, the soul expands, and the barometer rises, as if wishing to discern at a distance the coming of spring. At three o'clock in the afternoon, the large glass window of the room with which we are already acquainted was thrown wide open, and the

sun came pouring in, filling everything with light and color. The Marchioness loved the sun and air with the passion with which they are loved by the poor, and detested that mysterious and coquettish *petit-jour*, in which *passé* beauties take refuge, in order to conceal the ravages of time. In the garden, Monina's shouts while skipping rope blended with the roar of the sea lashing the coast, as if in nature, now so beautiful, so calm and splendid, the innocent harmonized with the terrible, the sea, and the child, supreme weakness and supreme strength. The Marchioness of Villasis, leaning against the window, watched the sport of this beautiful little being, who had taken possession of, and completely filled her heart, notwithstanding it was so large. This little girl was her grandchild, the daughter of her only child, who had died upon giving her birth five years before; her father's death, also, had left her doubly an orphan.

Suddenly the Marchioness closed the window and seated herself by it, next to a small *secrétaire*, upon which she was accustomed to despatch her ordinary correspondence. She had heard the rumble of a carriage in the distance, rolling upon the gravelled roads of the park, and shortly afterwards a servant entered the room and announced the Marquis of Sabadell. The man had no sooner left the room than the Marchioness crossed herself rapidly, fixing for a moment her large and brilliant black eyes upon a beautiful picture of the Virgin hanging in the lower part of the room, and then turned towards the door as smiling, as self-possessed, and as serene as when receiving her intimate friends in Madrid.

CHAPTER XIX

That the reader may understand how important this interview was for Jacob, it is necessary to acquaint him with certain prior events which time and chance had furnished up to that time, thus throwing some light upon the gloom sur-

rounding crimes still unpunished and intrigues not altogether disentangled. No one is ignorant of the fact that Masonry was triumphant in Spain at the breaking out of the Revolution of 1868. It seemed, notwithstanding, and reasonably enough to some of the leaders of the sect, that the Spanish populace was not yet sufficiently ripe to establish the Republic, and they resolved meanwhile to enthrone a constitutional monarch, who would be a mere instrument in their hands. The Duke of Aosta was therefore selected for this purpose, and General Prim and Don Manuel Ruiz Zorrilla, afterwards appointed honorary Grand Orient of the Supreme Council of Spain, were deputed as delegates of the sect to offer him the crown. For these reasons grave dissensions broke out in the very heart of the lodges, which resulted in the assassination of General Prim while the commission deputed to offer the crown officially to the Duke of Aosta was returning from Florence.

Forming part of this commission was a certain personage, a practical and prudent man, whose memory we are careful not to dishonor by supposing him to be affiliated with the sect, there being no certain testimony to prove it. It is, however, certain that said personage took a warm part in the politics of one of these factions, and carried with him upon that journey, with mysterious intent, papers of great importance, which compromised many of the sectaries of the opposite party.

Death surprised this person in Geneva the eleventh of December, and to the present day it is unknown by whom those papers were deposited in a certain lodge at Milan, which delivered them later on to Victor Emmanuel, as precious weapons which could well secure the always vacillating throne of his son in Spain, by completely foiling certain mercenary politicians, models in all epochs of disloyalty and shamelessness. It now happened that the Marquis of Sabadell, flying from Constantinople, lost and ruined, arrived in Milan, and presented himself at this lodge, into which, years before, Garibaldi had initiated him. The venerables wel-

comed him as an envoy from the Great Architect, and at once presented him to Victor Emmanuel, as the very man to convey documents and instructions to Spain, and to give to Don Amadeo's policy the impetus desired in Italy.

The reinforcement arrived late, however, as we have already seen how the fall of the Duke of Aosta destroyed the fine calculations which Jacob, with probable foundation, had made in Paris. He thus saw himself again alone and ruined, and necessity, always a bad counsellor, and created most frequently by rash undertakings, suggested to him the idea of utilizing the precious deposit to his own advantage. Thus arose complications and dangers, plans traced out and frustrated.

His original idea was to have placed his precious treasure at the disposal of the Alfonsists or Carlists, accordingly as the former or latter should have more or less chances of triumphing; and in order to destroy at once the bad impression which his sudden appearance in Paris had caused among the Alfonsists, he hastened to propagate by means of Uncle Frasquito the novel history of the Cadi's wife, which so gloriously justified his flight from Constantinople. But at the same time, and first of all, it was necessary to throw the deceived Masons off the track; to accomplish which, Jacob conceived the idea of becoming reconciled with his wife, and of secluding himself by her side for a year, living quietly meanwhile upon her income, and as far as possible cancelling with it his debts. He would sound the ground also gently and quietly, until he should find the highest bidder for his services, which he expected to sell at public auction. His reconciliation with Elvira was therefore the key to the castle he had built, and which he tried to insert in this interview. He accordingly entered the small room, armed with all his boldness, serene and smiling, with the air of one friend who prepares for another, by his unexpected appearance, an agreeable surprise. Upon seeing him enter, the Marchioness extended to him her hand with great kindness, saying affectionately: —

"Ah! Jacob! how are you? But one can see that time for you has stood still! I find you are the very same as when we met, five years ago, in Brussels; do you remember?"

Jacob cordially pressed the hand the lady offered him, between both his own, and replied with no less kindness and affection: —

"Of course I remember! Meetings with you are not easily forgotten! But you indeed seem never to have passed your twenty-fifth year; always so —"

"For Heaven's sake, Jacob! What a way to murder truth for the sake of a compliment. Don't you see my head? It is completely white!"

"Bah! That is the refinement of coquetry; you powder your hair like the Marchionesses of the Court of Louis XV."

"Well, it seems I have something in common with them," exclaimed the Marchioness, laughing; "at least in the proximity of the date."

Jacob meanwhile had seated himself upon a chair, on the other side of the *secrétaire*, which thus separated the two, and, after this first greeting, found himself somewhat embarrassed. Hoping that the Marchioness would first enter upon the subject in which both were interested, he began to speak of the great affluence of politicians of all sorts who were at that time flocking to Biarritz, which seemed to be the shore upon which the Spanish republic was casting the wreck of the Savoyan Monarchy. The Marchioness then broke the ice by saying in a very pointed manner: —

"Yes. It seems Biarritz is the chosen theatre for diplomatic negotiations."

Jacob pretended not to understand her meaning, and answered in the dictatorial tone of a politician: —

"Their issue is very doubtful. I believe none will succeed."

"None?" questioned the Marchioness, laughing. "Not even mine?"

"Ah! that is quite another thing!" replied Jacob, jovially.

"No one can resist the diplomacy of petticoats. I remember once hearing Castelar say that the world is governed by petticoats, — that is to say, by skirts and cassocks."

"Well, be it so, Mr. Bismarck; for I suppose you know I have been appointed plenipotentiary."

"Yes," replied Jacob; "I have already had the credentials delivered to me." Saying this he laid upon the top of the *secrétaire* the letter which, dictated by the Marchioness of Villasis herself, Elvira had written the evening before. The Marchioness read it attentively, as if she had never seen it before, and returned it to Jacob saying: —

"It seems to be all right. Bismarck may, when he pleases, unfold to me his line of action."

"I think it more fitting that Mr. ——," Jacob stopped, smiling, as if ignorant of the name of his diplomatic antagonist, and the Marchioness added very formally: —

"Antonelli. In this way we do not get out of petticoats."

"— that Monsignor Antonelli first expounds his. The Nuncio has always been the Dean of the diplomatic corps."

"And for that reason should speak last; so you are mistaken, Mr. Bismarck. But it does not matter, and I will expound mine with a sincerity unbecoming my office. My policy is: 'Our Father who art in Heaven — Thy will be done — Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us — Lead us not into temptation — Deliver us from evil.'"

The Marchioness emphasized some of these words in such a manner that her policy was perfectly understood by Jacob. The latter, whose trespasses were thus pardoned, well understood it so, and was filled with hope.

"Italian policy!" he said, shaking his head. "It is the most clever."

"Not Italian, but Roman," replied the Marchioness, quickly. "It is the most holy."

Jacob felt that the moment had come to drop this humorous tone, so peculiar to Spaniards even in their most serious

affairs, and disposed himself to enter upon his subject. His gloves, which he had taken off, he laid upon the *secrétaire*, and leaning upon it with both elbows, and twisting about a magnificent diamond ring which he wore upon one of his little fingers, he began to speak, looking at its reflections.

"Listen, Maria. I am very glad to be able to arrange this affair with you, rather than with Elvira, for you are a woman of the world, and will know how to understand my situation and put yourself in my place. Elvira is an angel with the wings of a swan; you are also an angel, but with an eagle's wings."

The simile was pretty, and the Marchioness acknowledged the compliment with a slight smile.

"My actual situation," pursued Jacob, "can be reduced to this: 'I have seen much of the world, and have soon become tired,' I remember having read in Confucio." The Marchioness could not help laughing outright upon hearing this holy father quoted with such pedantic formality by Jacob, and the latter, somewhat abashed, said, rather annoyed: —

"You laugh?"

"No, man, no. I am laughing at the author, not at the quotation; what is it?"

"A most profound one," replied Jacob. "'I ascended to the top of Mount Tam Sam, and the Kingdom of Su seemed small to me. I continued ascending, to the top of Mount Tai-San, still higher, and the empire seemed small.' The same thing has happened to me; the higher the events of my life have raised me, the more contemptible my triumphs have seemed to me."

"Well, assuredly, Confucio was not mistaken in the parable," said the Marchioness. "But to apply it to yourself, my friend, you put the shoe on the wrong foot. You should not say I ascended, but I descended; for these triumphs of your life have not exalted you, but rather lowered you exceedingly. So you should rather say: 'I descended into

the pool of Tam Sam, and I lost sight of virtue; I dived into the well, very much deeper and more miry, of Tai-San, and all ideas of honor and duty were completely effaced.' "

This brusque and unexpected attack completely disconcerted Jacob, and biting his lips he said bitterly: —

"Roman policy with all its intolerances."

"Bismarckian policy yours, with all its criminal — mark it well, its criminal — condescensions."

Jacob bowed his head in silence, pale with anger, and began to play with his gloves on the table. He understood that this evasive moral criterion, which masks vile defects and enormous vices with pompous names, was in the present instance rejected as false; that the Roman policy called bread, bread, and wine, wine; vice, vice; infamy, infamy; and trifles, monstrosities; and concluded by being convinced that he had made a mistake in trying to justify the past. He therefore resolved wholly to retract everything, at the same time calling to his aid what he judged to be his reserve force.

The Marchioness, for her part, had attacked him thus brusquely and cruelly in order to widen the field in which she wished to examine him, and also that she might not, through a too premature or credulous confidence, expose the trap which through her strategy she had set for the *farceur*.

"You are right, Maria," he said at length, gravely. "But you cannot do less than concede that the *amour propre* which bends to make this confession means and deserves something, and that it is neither charitable nor Christian to refuse to lend a helping hand to one who wishes to get out of the well. Father Cifuentes," he added with a sad smile, "notwithstanding he is more Roman than yourself, has conceded me both things."

"What did Father Cifuentes say to you?"

"He gave me this letter for you," answered Jacob, handing it to her.

The Marchioness read it, like the other, as if it were new

to her, and apparently giving it a margin which it by no means had, said quickly with an air of great contentment:

"This is quite another thing. Father Cifuentes' word for me is law, and I am entirely on your side. Explain to me now your wishes, clearly and concisely."

Castelar was right! There is not a doubt that cassocks divide with petticoats the empire of the world! And while Jacob was thinking this, with a certain angry indignation, which made Father Cifuentes seem still more odious to him, he began to trace out a charming plan, an aristocratic existence, half rural, half feudal, which he unfolded little by little. He had no wishes, nor could he conceive others than those Elvira might have. He had been conquered, and pardoned, and could have no other aspirations than to obey unconditionally, reviving again that distant time in which they had both been so happy, loving each other so tenderly. Here Jacob seemed to be very much affected, and gave evidence of his erudition by recalling the following from Dante: —

"Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria."

paraphrasing it with the quotation from the Marquis of Santillana: —

"La mayor cuyta que aver
Puede ningun amador,
Es membrarse del placer
En el tiempo del dolor."

The Marchioness was seemingly charmed, and also much moved, and urged him to lay aside all feelings of delicacy, and to state his plan of life, which, considering his reconciliation with Elvira as already effected, it would be a pleasure to discuss. From this, Jacob believed himself master of the situation, and his immense vanity made him feel the satisfaction of having deceived his antagonist before the pleasure of having gained his object. The thousand and

one pretty phrases which he had read and committed to memory, in order to embellish his romantic eloquence, flocked in confusion to his lips, bursting from them in torrents. What plan could he have, other than to pass the whole of his life adoring Elvira, with a passion humble and considerate, satisfied with burning at a distance, like the candle of a beggar on the lowest step of the altar? He owned in Grenada an old castle, the tower of Tellez-Ponce, with vast tilled lands and dense forests, whence, now undeceived as to the Revolution, he had often dreamed of opposing it, thus realizing the ideal grandee of ancient Spain, who, leaning upon his plough and sword, was, at one and the same time, master and protector of the district, father of his colonies as well as their chief. Would Elvira care to assist him in this work, by secluding herself with him in this retreat? Ah! if all the grandees of Spain, at last understanding its interests, would do the same, leaving luxury with its vices, and power with its knavery, to the improvident rich and venturesome politicians; if they would be charitable in the country, whilst the rest were usurers at Court, and would lend a kindly hand to the poor peasant, when others rejected him in scorn, the people, the real people, would at last realize which were their sincere friends; and the mud of politics might foment at Court, cause revolutions, and issue throughout the country shameless decrees, but all this insolence would exhaust its force upon the herbs of the fields, and its miry wave would never wash the portals of its churches or castles, defended by a bulwark of villages!

The Marchioness gazed upon and listened to Jacob with enthusiasm and with wonder; with wonder great and profound, as she had already read in Veuillot, some years back, something very similar to this beautiful peroration; and here in the very *secrétaire* before her, among Elvira's papers, she had stored away the deed of sale of the Tellez-Ponce tower, sold at public auction by Jacob's creditors, and privately bought in by Elvira herself, in order to save from

the usurers this last historical relic of the family to which her son belonged. The Marchioness's good-natured smile did not forsake her, however, before such an ignoble farce, and, enthusiastic and overcome, she hastened to assure Jacob that she could not imagine a plan more in harmony with Elvira's tastes, and that she accepted it without hesitation and would indorse it in her name.

"Is it not true that my idea is profound?" exclaimed Jacob, blinded by his vanity as an orator, which was the greatest and most petted of all his vanities.

Ah! it had cost him much sad experience to conceive and unfold it. And what made him find it more convenient at this moment, more dear to his understanding, and more grateful to his heart, was that it would remove the only obstacle which, in planning his reconciliation with Elvira, had presented itself. It was an obstacle of delicacy to a man of honor, who wished to put himself beyond the reach of gossiping tongues. He had heard in Paris, from Uncle Frasquito, that Elvira had gained an important lawsuit, and was at present very rich; this had almost made him abandon his project, for the world was very malignant, and a thousand murmuring tongues would lose no time in attributing this step of his, not to disgust of the world, nor to repentance, but rather to his wife's money and his own ruin. But by their retiring to Tellez-Ponce they could live upon the income of property which was his own, and Elvira's capital could be preserved intact for his son's patrimony. This was the first time during the whole course of the conversation that Jacob had mentioned the boy, and he did so now to insure a fraudulent imposture. The Marchioness felt an oppression at her heart, whilst hearing him speak of this repentance in which the thought of God did not enter, and of this love for his wife in which no affection for his son found part; but softening her smile more and more by an effort of her powerful will, and giving to her accent a more marked tone of confidence and affection, she said, shaking her head disdainfully: —

"Bah! Don't think of that."

"Yes, Maria, indeed one must think of it; for what is said of one, whether it be true or false, generally plays as great a part in our lives as what we really may have done. I well know it by personal experience."

"Do what is right, for God is God!" said the Marchioness, sententiously. "That is my motto!"

"And mine also; at least it has been lately. But one must not lose sight of the fact that, if virtue depends upon our own actions, honor depends upon public opinion."

"Well, you already have the favorable opinion of honorable people. What more do you want?"

"Nothing; I ask for nothing more," replied Jacob; "for this reason, when Father Cifuentes advised me what to do my doubts at once ceased."

"And moreover," added the Marchioness, with artless ingenuity, "your thoughts have coincided with mine. Of course a decent man could but think as you have done, and so I have foreseen, in order to silence your scruples, a very simple remedy."

"What is it?" asked Jacob, somewhat in suspense.

The Marchioness raised the lid of the *secrétaire*, and taking out the document written by herself the night before, placed it before Jacob, saying, with her customary frank and winning smile: —

"By signing this, the Rubicon will be passed."

Jacob began to read the document with some surprise, and as he perused its pages, his lips contracted and his cheeks turned crimson. The Marchioness fixed upon him a look of profound compassion. When he finished reading he threw the paper upon the table, murmuring: —

"But Maria! This is impossible — impossible. I cannot sign this!"

The document was a complete and explicit renunciation of all right of intervention and of all authority that the law might concede him in the administration of his wife's property, or in the management of his son's patrimony; and all

so perfectly detailed and planned with such prudence that Jacob's covetousness and rapacity would be completely nipped in the bud by simply signing his name to it. Antonelli had conquered Bismarck; the angel with eagle's wings had caught the devil with bat's wings by the foot. Jacob, wounded in his vanity and routed in his plans, was furious upon seeing himself caught in his own meshes; whilst the Marchioness, much surprised and astonished, asked him, without losing an atom of her apparent ingenuousness and womanly tact: —

"But why do you not care to sign? What is wrong about it?"

"Because — because, to sign this would be to renounce my dignity as a husband."

"Your dignity as a husband? But did you not say a moment ago that only the obstacle which this document removes had made you hesitate in your project?"

"But this paper lowers my dignity."

"On the contrary, it raises and secures your dignity in public opinion."

"When it is a question of honor, opinion can be dispensed with."

"Opinion dispensed with? But you said, only a moment ago, that what is said of one, whether it be true or false, generally plays as great a part in one's life as what one really may have done."

"There are cases in which the testimony of one's own conscience is sufficient for a man of honor."

"But, man . . . of honor! You have only just said that, although virtue depends upon our own actions, honor depends upon public opinion."

Jacob, forced like a wolf caught in a trap to seek an escape, and not finding one, exclaimed at last, breaking through all forms of constraint, the last thing that the most inapt of diplomats is wont to do: "Roman policy, with all its hypocritical meannesses and priestly intrigues!"

"Take care what you say, Jacob!" exclaimed the Mar-

chioness, energetically, "or you will lead me to think your Bismarckian policy conceals some infamy."

"Yours, yes, conceals an intrigue in which Father Cifuentes' hand is visible."

"Father Cifuentes' hand! Poor Father Cifuentes! You have no doubt discovered it from the mountain of Tai-San, which you ascended just now. For myself, as I live on level ground, I cannot detect it."

Jacob, tapping the top of the table with both gloves, was silent. The Marchioness asked him finally, without losing her serene calmness: —

"So you positively decline to sign?"

"I shall not sign," replied Jacob, angrily.

"Well, it is evident, if the reconciliation is not effected, you alone are to blame; for your wife has yielded as much as it is possible to yield, and you, by your own obstinacy, which is very suspicious, destroy all that has been done!"

"I destroy all that you or that blessed Cifuentes may have plotted; but I will have an understanding with Elvira."

"Elvira will not come to Biarritz."

"Very well, I will go wherever she is."

"I wager you will not!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jacob, exasperated. "Are these your God-fearing people? Where has my wife gained her independent notions? We are not legally separated, and the law authorizes me to reclaim my wife and son when I please."

The Marchioness drew herself up in her arm-chair, in an arrogant and menacing manner, for the first time displaying her powerful eagle's-wings, and with her closed hand gave a vigorous blow upon the table, saying at the same time: —

"Try to do so! Dare to do so, and the moment you take the first step she will present before the court a plea for divorce which will completely ruin you."

The aspect, the voice, and the energetic contempt of this threat overcame Jacob for a moment; but, quickly recovering his audacity he replied, full of rage: —

"Let her present it, if she likes. Where are the proofs?"

"She has them in her possession, sufficient to obtain a divorce, and more than enough to imprison whoever may deserve it."

"Maria!"

"Jacob! Did you think that, for the simple reason of being good, your wife must be always a martyr? Patience has a limit which decorum sometimes marks, and, alas for foxes, when lambs cease to be lambs!"

The Marchioness's terrible insinuation frightened Jacob in the midst of his perturbation and rage, and he tried to find out if the existence of these proofs was only a mere pretence.

"You cannot frighten me with words," he exclaimed ironically. "My conscience tells me such proofs do not exist, and I do not believe it."

"Well, we 'll see if your eyes will convince your conscience," replied the Marchioness, quickly. And opening with a jerk the little drawer of the *secrétaire*, she showed Jacob from a distance a package of four or five letters, saying: —

"In truth, Rosa Peñarron's handwriting and yours are so clear that connoisseurs would not be needed in court to identify them."

All the blood in Jacob's body rushed to his face, and by one of those brutal impulses when instinct shows itself in the natural man and not in the civilized man, he made a motion as if to snatch them from the lady. But the latter, quick as lightning, sprang to the open window, and leaning half-way out, with the letters in her hand, cried with great vehemence: —

"Monina! you will fall, child! Don't jump any more. Mademoiselle, take the rope away from her." Turning afterwards towards Jacob, a trifle pale but perfectly calm, she added, without leaving the window: —

"I thought she would kill herself! These little devils of children are always frightening one."

Jacob had remained glued to his seat, but now stammered: —

"Is Monina with you?"

"Of course she is! How could I be without my child? Have you never seen her? Would you like me to call her?"

And without waiting for an answer she called again from the window: —

"Mademoiselle! bring the child here."

Monina soon appeared, followed by the governess, and ran to jump in her grandmother's lap, looking at Jacob with the half smile of a spoiled child petted by everybody, which seemed to say to the stranger, "Are you not going to tell me I am very pretty?"

Jacob, completely surprised, took no notice of her, trying in vain to guess how Elvira had gotten possession of these letters, which were irrefutable proofs of one of the most shameful and compromising episodes of his life. The Marchioness embraced her grandchild as she would her guardian angel, thanking God from the bottom of her heart for having given Jacob this final blow with a tin-bladed sword; for these terrible papers with which her presence of mind and energetic audacity had annihilated the *farceur* were simply three or four letters from her lawyers, which she kept in the little drawer of the *secrétaire*. The shameful fact was certain, but the proofs did not exist; and Rosa Peñarron, the only accomplice, having been dead for two years, it was impossible that Jacob could ever discover the deception. The astute Antonelli had forever secured Bismarck with a spider's mesh.

Jacob, without bestowing upon the child a single caress, coldly took his leave, and Monina watched him go, sucking, with the air of an offended lady, three fingers at the same time. Still bewildered and full of rage, Jacob quickly entered the carriage and gave orders to the coachman to drive to Bayonne, to the Hôtel Saint-Étienne, where he had put up the night before. Biarritz was too small for one to remain hidden there, or to avoid embarrassing meetings with the Carlist and Alfonsist emigrants and grasping politicians of all classes who peopled the environs, and who, since the fall of Don Amadeo and the proclamation of the Republic, had increased the number of scattered Spaniards.

Jacob's undeceiving had been cruel, and his situation again became most painful, upon seeing all his illusions put to flight, leaving only in his soul a terrible anxiety and rage, which kindled in his heart against the Marchioness of Villasis and Father Cifuentes the implacable hatred which the wicked feel for those who, they know, have a right to despise them. Of all the wounds which the routed plenipotentiary of Constantinople carried in his soul, none afflicted his vanity so much, or irritated his pride more, than that his conquerors had been a devotee and a friar. In the paroxysm of his rage, he almost felt like strangling the sly Marchioness of Villasis with the bandana handkerchief of the hypocritical Cifuentes.

PART II

CHAPTER I

Memorable was that night. Pedro Lopez announced, the following day, in the columns of the *Fleur de Lis*, that the spirit of Meyerbeer had abandoned the mansions of Harmony to inspire the overture of Dinorah at the Royal Theatre. Pedro Lopez had seen something impalpable and harmonious, which revealed itself in the voices of the singers and in the echoes of the orchestra, descend from the chariot of Phœbus which decorated the ceiling, and diffuse itself through the intoxicating atmosphere of the splendid hall. . . . Villamelon had also seen something. Seated with his back to the stage in the rear of the box, his pensive head resting on the thin partition, and his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, he received in full the formidable blast of the hideous Æolus, who, standing behind the chariot of Phœbus, seemed to be blowing forth pneumonia and catarrh upon the bald pates seen in perspective of the hairless lovers of music. Currita, seated towards the front of the box, opposite Leopoldina Pastor, was entranced by the sublime triplet of the bell, the finale of the first act, when the thunder muttering in the distance, between the deafening clamor of bass viols and soft murmur of violins, sweet, delicate, and exquisite, seemed to reveal the warm breath of the approaching tempest, the fluttering of the leaves of the trees already shaken by the first gusts of wind, and the vague earthy perfumes which announce the coming rain.

"Che oscuro è il ciel!"

Currita, as moved as Dinorah herself, who attempts in vain to stop Bellak, the beloved white goat, glanced out of the corner of her eye at the Veloz Club box, where, gossiping and laughing among themselves, were Gorito Sardona, Paco Velez, Diogenes, Angelito Castropardo, and behind them all, conspicuous by his elegant attitude and haughty air, was Jacob Sabadell, his opera-glass levelled with most impertinent insistency upon another box, which Currita could not see, as it was directly over her own.

"Delicious!" said Currita, more and more moved; for at that moment the goat escaped, Dinorah ran after it, Hóel dragged Corentino away half mad with terror, and the orchestra died away slowly, *pianissimo*, in a soft murmur, dominating which, far, far, and still farther away, like a dim, mysterious, and magic echo, was heard the vibrating tinkle of Bellak's silver bell.[1]

The curtain now fell, and the audience remained for a moment speechless with admiration, still listening in this silence, in which one could have heard a leaf fall, and fascinated by that species of mild fear which the feeling of the sublime infuses in the soul. A tempest of bravos and applauses finally broke forth in the theatre, and Villamelon then awoke from his reverie, exclaiming with an air of profound conviction: —

"Just as I thought! The quail *vol-au-vent* always gives me indigestion!"

Currita, also subduing her artistic emotion, leaned quickly towards Leopoldina, whispering to her excitedly: —

"My dear! Whom can Jacob be staring at like that, in the upper box?" Leopoldina slowly turned her head, with that inimitable art which women have of seeing without looking, and cast a rapid glance at the Veloz Club box. The men were moving to and fro, and Jacob, standing in the box, was gazing through his opera-glass with most distinguished insolence in the direction indicated by Currita,

[1] The technical analysis of this opera is taken from a criticism by Señor Peña y Goni.

heedless of the facetious observations which, to judge by their laughter, his companions seemed to be making to him. Diogenes, gazing also in the same direction, caught Jacob by the arm, making at the same time, with his left hand, a large cross in the air. The men in the box laughed boisterously, and Leopoldina said very seriously: —

"Look! Diogenes has just married them."

Currita, much annoyed, again asked: —

"But who can be there?"

Leopoldina, an enthusiastic *dilettante*, who always went free to all the boxes of the Royal, had at her finger tips the leases of every tier, and the names of the subscribers of every section. She calculated a moment the direction in which the occupants of the Veloz box were looking, and finally said: —

"I don't know who it can be. That box is not leased."

Fernandito, with his hands in his trousers pockets, gave little taps on the floor with his foot, saying timidly: —

"I am very much bored. Do you know, Curra?"

Curra knew nothing, nor did she seem either to wish to know anything, but meanwhile asked Leopoldina to go, during the intermission, and visit Carmen Tagle's stall, whence she could have a full view of the incognitas or incognita of the upper box. The proposal anything but pleased Leopoldina, but it was impossible to refuse this small service to the generous friend in whose box, carriage, and at whose table, she always had a place at her disposal. For Leopoldina was one of those persons of inferior rank, busybodies and parasites, who suffer any number of annoyances and slights, in order to appear in the eyes of the vulgar to be always on terms of intimacy with the first figures of fashion and of the nobility. Her brother's brass-buttons and the captain-generalship of Madrid which the latter had held for some time, had given her *entrée* to the *beau monde* and there she had established herself and taken out naturalization papers. Villamelon, still tapping his foot, reiterated for the hundredth time, most miserably: —

"Don't you understand, Curra? I am ill."

"Fernandito, for Heaven's sake! Don't tell me so."

"It is indigestion. The quail *vol-au-vent*. It always gives me indigestion. I am certain of it. Do you understand, Curra?"

"What shall we do, my love! Try and walk a little; it will do you good. Go with Leopoldina, and come back quickly."

And more and more impatient, she admonished the latter in a whisper: —

"Don't let Carmen suspect why you go. Be sure and find out who they are, on the sly."

Villamelon, making faces, took the liberty to say: —

"Perhaps at home —"

"Home? Nonsense, my dear; what would you do there all alone? Suppose anything should happen to you. No, by no means; go with Leopoldina, and walk back slowly."

The Duke of Bringas entered the box, and shortly afterwards Uncle Frasquito came in, accompanying his niece Maria Valdivieso, overflowing as usual with enthusiasm and folly, gossip and stories. *La Ortolani* was a prodigy. What a *berceuse* that: *Si carina caprettina!* Uncle Frasquito did not agree with her. The romance *L'incantator della montagna* pleased him much more, and he was trying it on the flute, utterly regardless of King Midas's mishap, which for sometime previous Diogenes had prophesied would happen to Frasquito. The Duke of Bringas was much annoyed because the score did not please him; it was nothing more than a French comic opera, converted into Italian opera, and as far as Ortolani was concerned, psch! — she did not vocalize badly, but she was so thin!

"As if she was obliged to have chubby cheeks to sing well!" exclaimed Maria Valdivieso, with much good sense. And changing the conversation she began to tell Currita a very facetious story about the Duchess of Bara, who was seated just below them in the Lopez Morenos' box. The latter now being restored to their throne in Matapuerca,

Lucy was at last going to marry Gonzalito, the Duchess having agreed to swallow her as a daughter-in-law. So Paco Velez had said.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Currita, with malignant complacency; "just like her to talk behind the girl's back, and end by giving her her blessing and taking her under her wing."

"Exactly! Paco Velez said the very same thing. There they both are, cooing away in the box, publishing the marriage banns. Paco Velez says there have been more stories afloat! Lopez Moreno laid siege to Beatrice's property, and between the attachment and the wedding there was nothing to do but capitulate. Beatrice delivered over the dukedom, the other cancelled the debt, and everything was arranged. But the most amusing thing of all is, that Lucy will bestow a dot upon Gonzalito of four millions."

"How delicious! So in case of being left a widower, Gonzalito will always be prince *douarier;* that is to say, *douarier* of Matapuerca."

The Duke and Uncle Frasquito thought they would die laughing at Currita's repartee, and the Countess of Valdivieso added also, shaking with laughter: —

"Exactly! What a happy idea! I must certainly tell Paco Velez. *Le Prince douarier* of Matapuerca! We will give him the name, by all means; just at present they are laboriously trying to discover Lucy's genealogical tree."

"Well, my dear, I can give it to you intact. On the first branch you will find the Bad Thief, and Lopez Moreno will be hung on the last."

"Curra, you are in your zenith tonight!" exclaimed the Valdivieso, convulsed with laughter. "What would Beatrice say at Lucy's tree being disposed of in that way? Paco Velez says that Lopez Moreno is tremendously rich."

Here she stopped a moment as if surprised, and looking attentively towards the auditorium, added with her accustomed volatility: —

"My dear, do you see that? — Jacob over there with

Izabel Mazacan? How scandalous! Why do you allow such a thing?"

Had Currita seen that? As if the boiling within her was not the nervous muse which had that night inspired her sharp answers! For from the moment the curtain fell she had not lost sight of Jacob for an instant, watching him begin his *tournée* through the boxes, all the ladies receiving him with open arms, and spoiling and caressing him with their most enchanting smiles and sweetest words. Izabel Mazacan, especially, seemed to be inclined to eat him up, and two or three times while he was in the box with her she glanced towards Currita, with a look which seemed to say, "Rave away!"

He received all these homages with the exquisite ease, and distinguished *insouciance* of the born *élégant*, who knows himself to be the fashion and leader of the day, whose smiles are sought after, sayings repeated, wardrobe copied, and coughings and sneezings enumerated and commented upon. Never had Madrid accorded a pardon more generous or more gracious than that conceded the former revolutionary upon learning of his novel adventure in Constantinople, and upon seeing him re-enter the aristocratic fold, under the patronage of Butron and the Countess of Albornoz, repentant, but with his head held high, — not asking, but rather offering protection to all.

In the innermost recesses of boudoirs and in secret political meetings strange things were whispered. It was said that Jacob had done a great service to the Restoration party, completely foiling with certain mysterious papers three intriguing and swindling personages, who, ever covetous of power and money, had tried in Biarritz, after the fall of Amadeo, traitorously to co-operate in the Restoration of the throne, which they themselves had helped to overthrow five years before. Whether or not this was true, it was certain that the worthy Butron had suddenly thrown over Jacob the protecting mantle of his confidence, and that Currita had offered him the disinterested friendship of her beloved spouse

Fernandito. In these remote recesses of the boudoirs also, as well as on the broad sidewalks of the public plazas, the three personages were dubbed with the names of the young Telemachus, the prudent Mentor, and the invulnerable Calypso, — whispers at the same time circulating that Jacob was ruined, but that the Restoration guaranteed his future by insuring him a cabinet portfolio in payment for his services; Currita meanwhile attending to his wants with a magnificence which threatened to completely destroy the, until then, well grounded fortune of the opulent house of Villamelon.

"It is only natural," said the Duchess of Bara one night. "Curra is already *fanée*, and Jacob is no Juanito Velarde, to be maintained by any post of twenty thousand dollars." Meanwhile Leopoldina Pastor, entering Carmen Tagle's box, kissed her upon both cheeks and whispered: —

"I have just escaped!"

"My dear! from whom?"

"From Curra, that Curra, who is simply odious, dear, odious. I will never be seen in public with her again. I do not care for scenes; nor do I like scandals. So I said to myself, 'If only for this one *entr'acte* I will get rid of her and go to Carmen.'"

"Thanks, dear, for the choice."

"You are welcome, dear. She is dying to know who is in the upper box; and all because Monsieur does nothing but stare in that direction."

Leopoldina, upon saying this, seized Carmen Tagle's mother-of-pearl opera-glasses, and began to look towards the box which made Currita so uneasy. In it were two ladies, one quite young, seated towards the front, and the other of already mature age, nearly hidden in the background. The first seemed to be but a mere child, delicate and fantastic, one of those spirituelle little blond, cat-like women, who are reared on the banks of the Seine, and who really have, as a rule, all the cunning tricks of the feline race. Seated with her back to the stage, she looked as if she had never broken

a plate in all the days of her life, and glanced about the splendid hall, without allowing her eyes to rest upon any particular spot, in the indifferent manner of one who gazes upon a completely unknown multitude. She seemed to be there more to be seen than to see, and the exaggerated elegance, somewhat extravagant, of her gown of black velvet, with red camellias, clearly showed her preconceived idea of attracting everybody's attention. Her companion, who was probably her mother, was a very thin woman of rather distinguished appearance, with gray hair combed *à l'anglais*, her high-necked dress of black velvet adorned with an attractive set of false diamonds. Both seemed to be foreigners, and during the entire evening did not exchange a single word. Leopoldina examined them attentively, and finally said, shaking her head: —

"Black and red; very bad, — the devil's colors. And who are these people?"

Carmen Tagle laughed, shrugging her shoulders, and Leopoldina continued to examine them with the glass, remarking at the same time: —

"Well, I must say the mother could well afford to spare some of her gown, which reaches to her ears, to lessen a little her daughter's *décolleté*. Out upon the good-for-nothing! But the girl is really beautiful. What is her name?"

"No one knows. Tuesday she appeared in that same box, dressed in white with pink camellias. Yesterday she was at the Castellana, in a very smart milord, with camellias in her hat and in her dress. To-night she is wearing black velvet with red camellias."

"But now we have a name for her," exclaimed Leopoldina, laughing. "'Camille,' of course."

And with these thin materials the two friends amused themselves, improvising a lively fiction, until Leopoldina, a few moments before the second act, returned to the Albornoz box. Currita was impatiently awaiting her, and the fallacious explorer hastened to tell her, with a certain malignant enjoyment, that the incognita in question was a very beau-

tiful young girl, a total stranger to everybody, whom they had just christened with the significant name of "Camille."

"Of course you did not let Carmen know I sent you," said Currita, thoughtfully; and Leopoldina, with her small nose turned up and eyebrows raised, as one offended by the question, replied: —

"My dear! What an idea! Do you think I am stupid?"

The act began. Villamelon's indigestion was no better; Currita, still furious, sat with the corner of her eye on the alert. Leopoldina, who was really talented and intelligent, did not lose a note of the opera, and Uncle Frasquito stayed on, thoroughly well satisfied to find himself by the side of Leopoldina, one of his favorite spurious nieces, because of her masculine and decided attractions and eccentric geniality. In the Veloz box Diogenes and Jacob were now alone; the former sitting stupidly facing the audience, as if wishing to show he did not care a fig for the whole lot of them, and the latter still staring like a cadet at the box of *la dame aux Camélias*. On the stage Dinorah, the poor maniac, was singing the exquisite aria, inspired by her own shadow projected on the ground by the white light of the moon. It was one of Meyerbeer's happiest inspirations and was admirably interpreted by the then famous Ortolani.

The scene presently changed, and the cascade, the precipice, and the torrent drew a murmur of admiration from the spectators, who had not often witnessed such a finished and beautiful work of art. Hóel tries to compel the piper Corentino to find the treasure at the bottom of the precipice; the sky again becomes overcast, and Meyerbeer again appears, the terrible genius of the Huguenots, and *Robert le diable*, who knows so well how to describe, with the eight notes of the staff, all the raging of the elements and fury of the heart.

The orchestra suddenly and brusquely breaks the rhythm, the bass-viols roar clamorously, the flutes send forth sharp, hissing sounds, while the trumpets, bursting all bounds, thunder forth with frightful violence, which the drums re-

echo convulsively. This was no longer a tempest, nor a hurricane, but a deluge, which threatened to destroy the earth; and at this supreme moment of the opera, a hairy and sallow face appeared between the crimson velvet curtains at the back of Currita's box, which Uncle Frasquito took to be the terrible Adamastor, the genius of tempests, and Fernandito thought was the bilious spectre of indigestion, which his outraged gastric organs had evoked before him. It was Butron, the worthy Butron, who had come in on tiptoe, with his finger on his lips, making signs for no one to move, and seating himself in the chair, which, notwithstanding his fright and his secret annoyance, Villamelon had hastened to yield him by Currita's side. The tempest still raged; Hóel and Corentino groaned with terror, and Dinorah, the poor maniac, having broken away, with her hair flying and her countenance illuminated by the glare of the lightning, defied the fury of the elements; her voice, pure and vibrating, dominating the hoarse crashing of the thunder and the wailing cry of the wind, which also drowned these brief words, whispered by Butron to Currita: —

"The hour has arrived; Concha is with us!"

A slight exclamation of surprise escaped the latter, which Uncle Frasquito accidentally overheard; but a flash of blue lightning at this moment illumined the scene, and an immense chromatic scale, born in the heights of the orchestra, and dying away in the depths of the bass-viols with a faint and ominous murmur, showed that the thunderbolt had struck; and between lightning and thunder and the sublime convulsions of the stringed instruments, he lost what Butron added, being able to distinguish only these words, repeated by the diplomat with great emphasis: —

"To-morrow at four o'clock at my house. Whatever you do, don't fail, or neglect to inform Jacob."

Curiosity caused Uncle Frasquito completely to lose his head, and wishing to take in everything at once, he saw neither Bellak, the white goat, cross like a flash the little rustic bridge, nor Dinorah fall to the bottom of the hill,

nor Hóel throw himself down in desperation to her aid, nor Currita, who, making signs and clasping her fan with inexplicable rage, whispered very low to Butron: —

"Inform Jacob? Is it probable that I shall see him to-night? He has already visited all the boxes and as yet has not even looked at me."

"Ah! ingrate!" murmured Butron. "I will go at once and bring him."

And he went away as he had come, on tiptoe, and smiling at everybody, making mute signs for no one to disturb themselves, and leaving Uncle Frasquito stupefied. Ah! but they need n't think they could deceive him. Currita at four o'clock in Butron's house, and informing Jacob beforehand? Something important was about to happen, if the prudent Mentor, the young Telemachus, and the invulnerable Calypso were to have a secret interview, with the odd circumstance that the lady would go to the gentleman's house, instead of the gentleman going to the lady's palace, as the most rudimentary laws of gallantry would seem to dictate.

"A most singularr thing!"

And looking at Jacob from a distance, his curiosity increased upon seeing Butron lift the curtain of the Veloz box, make a sign to Jacob, and both walk off together, the cynical Diogenes following them without being asked. The act finished, Butron, triumphant and satisfied, again entered Currita's box, this time with Jacob, and pushing him towards the lady with the air of an easy-going papa who indulges a daughter's caprice, seized, with one of his hands, the lady's hand and Jacob's, which they had mutually clasped upon greeting each other, and murmured with sententious indulgence Shakespeare's words: "Old, old history!"

This done, the mirror of gentlemen, according to Pedro Lopez, the sincere diplomat, judicious politician, and venerable and fervent old man, who already had one foot in the grave, glanced at his watch, raised his eyebrows, and

hurriedly took his leave. It was already eleven o'clock; at quarter-past he had an appointment with the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo. The business on hand treated of an attempt against the Church by the *canaille* of the republican government, and he desired to play in this conflict the rôle of Constantine.

Uncle Frasquito's spirits rose as he believed the hour had come to find out something, and he cocked his ears and sharpened his tongue in order cleverly to sound Jacob and Currita. But suddenly a perfidious hand grasped the meditative knot of his white cravat, and wheeling it rapidly round, deposited it on the nape of his neck. He turned, indignant and surprised, to see bending over him Diogenes' great head, who smiling and drivelling said to him, lovingly: —

"Francesca, my own! It is no one but Paolo!"

Francesca turned white with rage and yellow with fear, as if behind Paolo he had seen the sinister shadow of Gionciotto, and muttered between his teeth: "What a nuisance! Really, you are a great bore!"

And taking a hurried leave, for fear of some other serious mishap, he went into the adjoining dressing-room to arrange his cravat, thus leaving his chair vacant, which was what Diogenes wanted. The latter took possession of it with the utmost coolness, and giving Villamelon a sound slap on the hip said something so atrocious relative to his digestive organs that Jacob and Leopoldina glanced at each other spontaneously, as if to say, "Brute!" and Currita, very much annoyed, said: "Heavens! What a man! You are very shocking, really."

Fernandito with a resigned smile answered: "The quail *vol-au-vent* always gives me indigestion, you know!"

"I should think I did know, *Polaina!* that 's why I always take garlic soup *vol-au-vent*," replied Diogenes. And yielding to his natural impertinent instinct he added: "Tell me, in whose carriage am I to go home after the opera; yours or Jacob's?"

"Not in mine," replied the latter, quickly; "I am leaving at once."

"Nor in mine, either," added Currita. "Fernandito is not well, and we are certainly not going out of our way for any one."

"But, my dear woman; it is just on your way; you have only to leave me at Doña Mariquita's café. Not for the world would I miss my mug of chocolate and couple of *mojicones.*"[1]

"They are very good indeed," opined Villamelon.

"How delicious!" said Currita. "If they would stick in your throat every night you would not have such a long tongue."

"*Polaina!* If they could only stick you in the same place, there would be no reason for the tongue to annoy you."

Currita bit her lip, realizing it was impossible to argue with this savage, who seemed to amuse himself by throwing into relief, with his rude sayings, the shameless condescensions of the world, and Jacob took an affectionate leave, at the beginning of the last act, with an ambiguous "Until later," which left Currita very well satisfied. In the middle of the act, when Dinorah, recovering her reason, seeks to recall the exquisite prayer *Sancta Maria!* amidst the sublime quaverings of the orchestra, which seemed to reveal the mental efforts of the poor maniac, Currita, enveloping herself in her superb wrap of maroon velvet lined with white fur, and accepting Diogenes' arm in token of reconciliation, left the box accompanied by Villamelon and Leopoldina; the former delighted to be at last on the way to sleep off his attack of indigestion, and the latter furious that she must leave without hearing the final chorus of the Pilgrims.

The foyer was as yet deserted, and the footmen, ducking their red noses in their immense fur collars, were already

[1] Sort of sweetmeat. — Tr.

beginning to assemble, in order to announce to their masters the arrival of the carriages. Currita now conceived the idea of seating herself upon a divan to await the exit of the people. Villamelon was miserable.

"My dear Curra! What are you about? It is freezing cold here!"

And he hastily tied a large and very fine silk handkerchief around his neck, and pulled up the collar of his great-coat until it reached his ears.

"I tell you it is much better to return to the box, if —"

A formidable sneeze interrupted him, and his misery increased.

"You see! you see! I have taken a fine cold. I am in luck to-night, do you understand? — I am in for a week of it."

The people began to file out in front of Leopoldina, and the Countess of Albornoz leaving Fernandito to sneeze, and without losing sight of the business on hand, bowed right and left to her innumerable acquaintances. Presently Leopoldina pulled Currita's dress softly, saying in a very low voice: —

"Look! There she is."

She saw nothing; two white phantoms passed before her, dragging beneath their ample opera-cloaks their long black velvet trains, the elder lady showing through her protecting hood a sharp, aquiline nose, and the younger woman only displaying a pair of large blue eyes, which Currita thought were fixed upon herself with provoking insolence. The incognita's white Albornoz cloak grazed Currita's wrap of maroon velvet, and some words in German were uttered, which the latter heard, but could not understand, "*This is she*," and which seemed to fall from the lips of the one with the sharp, aquiline nose, both phantoms disappearing through the crowd, preceded by a smart young groom who could scarcely be more than twelve years of age.

"But, my dear, shall we ever be going?" said Villamelon meanwhile. "Diogenes, give her your arm. A nice cold

have I caught! What do you do when you have a cold, Diogenes?"

"What do I do? Sneeze!"

CHAPTER II

Butron struck the furniture with his fists, and crossed the room with long strides, calling his wife, as usual, sometimes Geno and again Veva, but never by her full name, Genoveva, and lavishing upon her with all their syllables the epithets "imbecile," "stupid," "wife of the devil," and "bigoted devotee," who, ignorant of everything except the *Pater Noster*, wished to give him lectures, — him, a Pyrrhus in genius, a Ulysses in prudence, an Anteus in valor, an Alexander in magnanimity, and a Scipio in good fortune.

There are some curious domestic scenes of the family hearth, which would seem most improbable to those who only know the official side of great personages, and which should be sculptured as bas-reliefs upon the pedestals which public opinion and the mob erect to many of the social prototypes who shine in academies, and congresses, drawing-rooms and salons.

The Marchioness, an old lady of spotless virtue and fine education, listened to this torrent of abuse mute and motionless, with her head bowed and her eyes full of tears, like the statue of patience contemplating its own sufferings. Twice she attempted to interrupt her husband, by showing him a letter which she held in her hand; but the cries and affronts of the wise diplomat intimidated and perturbed her, and she was forced to keep silence. Such scenes as those of Lauzun threatening his wife, the Duchess of Montpensier, with his cane, and shouting to her, "Louise of Bourbon, pull off my boots!" were doubtless not unknown to the unhappy Marchioness.

Both husband and wife were in the diplomat's private study, a vast room, in former times decorated with severe magnificence, but over which the years had flown, leaving cracks and crevices, stains and shadows, which the small retired pay of the nobleman had not as yet been sufficient to repair. At one end of the room, behind a large screen with nine folds, of Coromandel lacquer, peeling off in every direction, was a large table strewn with papers, and surrounded by artistic chests of drawers, all within hand's-reach. This was Butron's *sanctum sanctorum*, where only those initiated in the affairs and manœuvres of the diplomat were permitted to enter. At the other end of the room, opposite a large glass window overlooking the garden, and next to a black marble mantelpiece, was a large square table of the seventeenth century, made of walnut, with specious carvings and fluted irons, while comfortable lounges and luxurious armchairs, somewhat faded and very much worn, were placed around it. Here Butron received those privileged to cross the threshold of his private study. Everywhere, on the tables, upon the two mantels, on the chests of drawers, and hanging from the walls, could be seen portraits of kings, princes, and illustrious personages, some being photographs and others magnificent steel engravings, with pompous dedications to the loyal diplomat, which proclaimed his great acquaintanceship and his high influence. Upon a sofa of rich Japanese skins, all sunken in and peeling away, was placed in a conspicuous place a large photograph of Prince Alfonso, in the scholar's uniform of Maria Theresa's College, with the following dedication in the handwriting of the future monarch: "To the loyal Marquis of Butron, model of gentlemen. — Souvenir of the second of December, 1870. Alfonso." This solemn date was that of the day upon which Butron had his first audience after the Revolution with their dethroned Majesties, when he swore, at the feet of the royal child, to restore him to the Spanish throne or die in the attempt.

In another part of the room, on either side of a large suit of armor, full of rust and out of repair, were two handsome

engravings of Louis Philippe and Queen Amélie, with conspicuous dedications from both; and among another lot of regal, political, and literary notabilities, distributed in all directions, was a lithograph portrait of Martinez de la Rosa, taken at the time when he was called *Rosita la pastelera* and which bore this homely inscription: *To Pepillo Butron, from his dominie Paco.*

But among all these testimonials of high esteem, the most curious was a handsome photograph of the Queen of England, placed with affected ease on the mantel-piece, upon a small easel of oxidized silver, whose hangings partly covered the honorable dedication. Her Britannic Majesty had bestowed it upon him in Rome, as an acknowledgment of some well-timed service, and, desiring to show him the most exquisite deference, had inscribed her autograph in Spanish. But her Gracious Majesty evidently was not well skilled in the tongue of Cervantes, and it being her intention to write, according to the English construction, "To the Marquis of Butron, *recuerdo*," she left out the "u" and the result was: "To the Marquis of Butron, *recerdo*,"[1] — signed and subscribed in the handwriting of her Gracious Majesty, the sovereign of the three united kingdoms and also Empress of the Indies.

The astonishment of Butron was great upon seeing himself reduplicatively placed, by this startling syncope, upon the most discreditable branch of the extensive pachyderm family, and he hastened cleverly to place the regal keepsake in a frame, which, without altogether hiding the honorable inscription, would at least cover her Britannic Majesty's unfortunate slip of the pen.

Great events were taking place, and the dispute which Butron was sustaining with his wife had its origin in them. On the third of January Pavia gave the final blow to the infant Republic, which went to pieces at the echo of three or four shots discharged in the congressional corridors. Power fell again into Serrano's clutches, and the general disorder

[1] *Cerdo* — hog. — Tr.

and lack of discipline in the army, which fought without faith and without hope in those two great flood-gates of Carthagena and the North, which swallowed torrents of blood and rivers of money, proved to the patient Alfonsists, waiting with folded arms, that the hour was approaching when they might seize the already well matured fruit. Aristophanes' scene in his comedy "Peace," when the pacific Trigeo ascends Mt. Olympus mounted upon a black beetle, was being enacted in Spain. Olympus was deserted, with only War and Ruin there to grind into atoms an entire nation, while an ambitious general acted as their ally.

Another general, of much prestige for courage and prudence, now took it upon himself to bend towards the Alfonsists the branch upon which hung the appetizing and much contested fruit. This was General Concha, who having accepted the command of the Northern army, left for Bilbao, determined to re-establish discipline, and to annihilate the Carlists by proclaiming young Prince Alfonso King of Spain. It was, however, necessary first of all to obtain resources for the army; but depleted purses, alarmed covetousness, and latent egotism greatly hindered the execution of the project. The Marquis of Butron's ingenuity now came into play, and at the head of his feminine hosts he undertook the task of solving the difficulty. He conceived the idea of provisionally forming an association of women, with the object of helping the wounded soldiers of the North, which should have branch associations in all parts of Spain, thus collecting resources of all kinds, to be generously distributed to the army in the name of the Alfonsist women, — in this way preparing the people to second the movement.[1]

[1] Many were the associations of women founded at this time with the object of helping the wounded soldiers of the North, the most beneficent results being obtained from that presided over by the illustrious and virtuous Marchioness of Miraflores, whose name has always appeared in connection with all good and charitable works. It seems useless to inform the reader that the association which we describe has nothing to do with any of the above, and that, although assuming their characteristic traits, it is in its make-up purely an invention of our own.

The plan was enthusiastically approved by the leaders of the party, and the great Robinson then concentrated the energetic activity which characterized him in organizing the central association of women at the Court. He devoted himself first of all to the selection of the President, the foundation-stone of the whole edifice; and an illustrious name, which carried with it all that was great, good, and noble to be found at Court, was the first to occur to him: the Marchioness of Villasis.

The conciliatory theories, however, of the hairy diplomat, deemed it advisable to secure other elements, and he accordingly hit upon the Countess of Albornoz for the post of Vice-President. The latter would attract the dashing and brilliant side of Madrid, which sparkles and bubbles like a small but venomous leaven, and corrupts the whole of society by imposing upon it its laws and vices, making it appear scandalous to a degree which it really is not. The former would draw about her all of honorable, sensible, and devout Madrid, not so small in number as many believe, and around these two central figures, Madrid, really immense, would hasten to group itself, — this great courtly phalanx of people, more frivolous than corrupt, more shallow than vicious, who live by reflected light and scandalize or edify accordingly as the star which sheds its lustre upon them scandalizes or edifies.

The plan was excellent. But who would put the salt on the bird's tail? Who would ally the inflexible and austere Marchioness of Villasis and the amiable and frivolous Currita, even should it be for them to conquer the Holy Land together? Who could subdue the Countess of Albornoz's immense vanity to the point of making her accept under any circumstances a secondary position? The astute Butron resolved to make the attempt by contriving a meeting between the two ladies, and appointed his own house as neutral ground without informing either of the other's expected presence, alleging as a pretext the necessity of privately treating, in a reunion of notabilities, an affair of the utmost

importance for the party. He accordingly decided to inform Currita the night before at the theatre, and at his express command his wife wrote to the Marchioness of Villasis, with whom she was connected by an old, affectionate, and sincere friendship. The future President at once divined what was in the wind, and a convenient cold, beastly and obstinate, made it impossible for her to leave her house. To this effect she wrote, with great regret and in affectionate terms, to her good friend Genoveva, upon a small and elegant sheet of note paper, in one corner of which, beneath the ducal crown common to the grandees of Spain, was inscribed her name, "Maria."

Butron's wife had expected this answer, and told her husband so upon showing him the letter, and it was then the worthy diplomat had vented his wrath upon the poor lady, by pouring upon her the epithets quoted in the beginning of the chapter. Suddenly he recovered his courtly smile and his lordly and pompous mien. The Duchess of Bara had entered the room, another of the invited guests, and an old friend of the Marquis, although not of very ancient date, about whom scandal had busied itself many years back, and even yet continued to do so at times. The Duchess was a very discreet woman, anything but scrupulous, who knew Madrid inch for inch, and Butron listened to her as to an oracle, in all that concerned feminine war of intrigue and fan-taps. Next arrived General Pastor, who was also shortly to leave for the North, to second Concha's movement, and a few moments later came one Don José Pulido, Butron's right-hand man and Egerian nymph, clever and astute, who had been one of the latter's fellow-pupils at the University, and had filled very good positions through the diplomat's influence.

It was already three o'clock, and Jacob Sabadell and the Countess of Albornoz were expected at four, the hour when the Marchioness of Villasis would also have come had not her providential cold prevented. Butron had prudently arranged these appointments with an hour's interval, in order

to prepare this first group of his intimate friends for what would be discussed later in the presence of the others. They all seated themselves near the fireplace, around the square table, and Butron began to expound the case. The Duchess of Bara did not allow him to finish. It was her opinion that it would be impossible to make the Marchioness of Villasis swallow Currita as Vice-President, unless she should be taken by surprise, by unexpectedly having the candidature unanimously approved in advance, and presented to her at the coming general assembly of women. And even then she very much doubted the result, for Maria Villasis was an impertinent and ridiculous Quixote, capable of slighting the whole of Madrid if it entered her head to do so.

"I shall never forget what she did to poor Rosa Peñarron, at the time of the famous concert which Rosa organized for the benefit of the inundated people of Valencia. Rosa sent her three tickets, and she had the assurance to return them with the exact price, some fifteen or twenty cents, sending almost immediately afterwards to Valencia, through the hands of the Archbishop, an alms of three thousand dollars."

Butron raised his formidable eyebrows, General Pastor stroked his long beard, and Don José Pulido, more practical and less punctilious, puffed out his thin, bearded cheeks, saying suavely: —

"If she only sends us as much, even through the hands of the Moor 'Muza — '"

The Duchess, who had just sold her son and his dukedom to Lopez Moreno, was much offended, and with great dignity answered severely: —

"Ah! indeed no, Pulido! Decorum is priceless and cannot be bought; neither do we need Maria Villasis here to give us lessons in it."

Moreover, she very much doubted what the latter's attitude might be in regard to the Restoration, nor did she know how far she might be counted upon in the work for it. True, her friendship with the dethroned Queen had always been in-

timate, loyal, and sincere, but she had heard on good authority that Bravo Murillo had had the presumption to inform the Marchioness of the answer given by the Archbishop of Valladolid, as to whether the Restoration would preserve Catholic unity or not, and his reply could not have been more final, — "that it was not licit for any political party to destroy it;" which was all nonsense, of course, on the part of the doting Archbishop, but was sufficient to alarm the conscience of a dissembler like Maria Villasis, and for her to find in it an excuse for keeping a tight hold on her purse-strings.

The Marchioness of Butron lowered her eyes, as if greatly distressed upon hearing Catholic unity thus spoken of, and the shadow of sadness which always clouded her face deepened still more. The diplomat and Don José Pulido exchanged rapid glances. The two cronies had doubtless discussed the affair more than once, in their intimate reunions behind the screen. Butron now spoke, extending his hairy hand: —

"I will answer for Maria Villasis," he said energetically. "What you say is true, Beatrice; but Bravo Murillo's *faux pas* I have already rectified. Maria at that time hastened to me, very much alarmed, asking for categorical explanations, and I solemnly promised her that the Restoration would preserve Catholic unity at all costs, as the most precious jewel in the Spanish crown."

The Duchess shrugged her shoulders with signs of great impatience.

"Well, the declaration which Bravo Murillo declined to sign does not say so," she said.

"Neither does it say anything to the contrary."

"And then what?"

"Then what I have promised stands. The future, however, cannot be insured, and perhaps it might happen that against our will and our wishes we might find ourselves forced either to respect a consummated fact or to yield before a contrary vote made by Parliament."

Pulido made a profound signal of assent, casting down his eyes with foreseeing resignation; and the Duchess, making a great display of the perspicuity of her mental faculties, exclaimed lightly: —

"Enough! enough! I quite understand; nevertheless, the other extreme remains to be conciliated. Do you think the monkey Jenny will be contented with the vice-presidency?"

Butron was amazed at this strange four-footed candidate which the Duchess was trying to introduce into the illustrious assembly of ladies, and exclaimed, very much surprised: —

"The monkey Jenny?"

"Curra, of course, man, — the Villamelona. Have n't you heard? Diogenes gave her that name when she first began to smoke a pipe, — an exquisite narghile with which she was presented by the Moorish ambassador. There is a famous monkey in the Zoölogical Gardens in London, — I have seen it, — which smokes the pipe with certain airs and graces that exactly remind one of Curra."

"There! there!" exclaimed the diplomat, with Olympic good-humor, "I have never seen anything to equal Madrid for nick-names and malicious stories. We all love each other so much, are together night and day, and yet tear each other to pieces and ridicule one another the moment any of us turn our backs."

"Hear the Puritan! How charitable! *Ami de la vertu, plutôt que vertueux.* You have certainly had time enough to become accustomed to it all."

"I will begin by accustoming myself to the monkey Jenny. The monkey Jenny will accept the vice-presidency."

"Are you sure?"

"I believe so. For I have in store for her another most important part, which will make her forget the secondary rôle of the former."

Butron then expounded his plan in all its details. The association was no longer a question of Alfonsist ladies exclusively; he had said so a thousand times, and would never tire repeating it. They must sweep within and conciliate

every one's wishes, put all scruples to flight, search every corner wherever a penny might be found, scrape every rubbish heap for any bundle of dirty bandages which might be hidden there, and exhaust all the resources of feasts, balls, bull-fights, benefits, sprees, and festivals, with which modern charity has learned the secret to wipe away tears, as well as cheer up their spirits, fill their stomachs, and stretch their legs. "Help for the wounded soldiers of the North." What a tempting bait with which to catch, not only the most opposed Carlists, but also the most radical liberals! For this reason he had thought of effecting this general and decided sweep in a grand ball, a celebrated and famous feast, on a broad basis, which must be given by the monkey Jenny, Curra, inviting all of exploitable Madrid, from the wife of the President consort of the Carlist Committee to the wife of the retiring minister, the most worthy spouse of his Excellency Sr. Don Juan Antonio Martinez. And there, in the heat of the champagne, which melts compassionate hearts, and under the influence of stimulated vanities which excite in all the desire to cut a figure, they would lower the net of charity, throw out the bait of the unfortunate wounded soldiers, and catch with a single haul among the meshes of this assemblage of ladies all of feminine Madrid capable of helping the cause. Afterwards a general preparatory meeting would take place at Butron's own house, presided over by Genoveva, and then must be presented and approved unanimously the candidature, prepared beforehand, of a directive committee, in which all the elements would be so cleverly combined that the Restoration party would be in the ascendency, enabling Butron meanwhile to grind this directive committee and the whole association as easily as he might a hand-organ. The directive committee was therefore the key of the situation, the *clou* of the project, and the worthy Butron terminated his peroration by requesting those present to be kind enough to study thoroughly the question, and to present their candidates according to the following plan, which he had jotted down upon a slip of paper:—

President, — A charitable woman of great renown (no one to equal Maria Villasis);

Vice-President, — An elegant and dashing woman (no one like Curra Albornoz);

Six Members, — One a rather stupid Carlist, and another a Radical of limited mental resources, with four Alfonsists of the nobility, of the *crême de la crême*, honest of course, clever and elegant;

A literary Secretary;

And a Treasurer belonging to high financial circles.

General Pastor enthusiastically applauded the diplomat's clever strategy, and Don José Pulido modestly lowered his eyes as if the greater part of the idea had originated with him. The Duchess was enchanted, and began to suggest proper names and offer critical opinions, descriptions, and biographical facts, which clearly proved her consummate skill in the art of prying into her neighbors' lives. There were any number of stupid persons in the world, and clever ones were not wanting either; the difficult thing in her opinion would be to find the honest ones; not because there were not shoals of them, but because the Duchess was not capable of finding them, for the sole reason that there is no one more exacting, nor who delights more in seeing faults in others, than he who lives in the midst of vice.

The worthy Butron received all these homages with a majestic smile, and fearing to see Currita enter at any moment, again recommended to those present the greatest discretion in respect to the latter. They must conceal from her the plan of the directive committee, and must arouse her enthusiasm on the subject of the ball, by making her believe that, through its means, the party put into her hands the success of the project. Once engrossed with this idea, it would be easy to make her swallow by surprise and in due time the secondary rôle of the vice-presidency.

At last the "monkey Jenny," Currita, arrived, with Jacob Sabadell, the young Telemachus. They had delayed a little, but it was Uncle Frasquito's fault. What a joke on the poor

old stupid! He had no doubt heard that something was up, and had dropped in to breakfast with a questioning face and suspicious air! She had been blessing him during the whole meal, until finally, to get rid of him, had to play a trick on him, a most facetious *guet-apens!*

She had invited him to take a turn with her in the Retiro, with Miss Buteffull and the children, and had sent him out to the carriage with them, while she got her hat on. Poor old man! As soon as his back was turned she had escaped with Jacob by the servants' stairway, and they had both come together in Jacob's carriage, all alone, like a young married couple. How delicious!

She kissed the Marchioness with filial affection, and the Duchess of Bara with fraternal love, squeezed Butron's hand with infantile delight, and had a caressing smile for General Pastor and a patronizing and irresistible little nod for Don José Pulido. Butron made her sit down beside him and next to the Marchioness, and she, with her light eyes fixed upon the portrait of the Grand Duke Alexis, which, overhung by a cobweb, was directly in front of her, began to lament in dulcet tones Fernandito's attack of indigestion. She had almost been upon the point of not coming, dreading to leave him alone; but the news which Butron had told her was so serious and so encouraging that she had finally decided.

"If you had not come, we should all have gone in a body to your house," exclaimed Butron, with great vehemence. "Because without you nothing can be done, and verily the fate of the party is in your hands."

Vanity did for the Countess of Albornoz what shame had never succeeded in doing, — made her blush.

"Heavens! Butron; poor me!" she exclaimed, in her sweet little voice. "If the fate of the party is in my hands be sure that I will not let it escape!"

Butron then began to explain the project, as if it was completely new to all present, making no mention whatsoever of the committee, and only putting forth with great cleverness the desired feast, as the axis upon which must turn the suc-

cess of the project, the restoration of the throne, the happiness of Spain, the peace of the world, and European equilibrium. Currita seemed to hesitate, because she had glanced at Jacob as if to consult him, and the latter had frowned. The lady was clever, and it was not so easy to dupe her. The diplomat re-enforced his arguments, and General Pastor with military frankness said resolutely: —

"You can do more, Countess, at that ball with your fan, than I can do in the North with my sword."

Don José Pulido, twirling his thumbs, added with a very soft smile: —

"Ah! Lady Countess! If you wish, the ball can justly be called the sweet alliance."

The lady extended both her little hands with a gesture of comic fright.

"Ah! no, no, Pulido, never! Why, that is the name of the confectioner's shop on the race course of San Jeronimo!"

The Duchess now came to the rescue, and with feminine ingenuity, shot the surest arrow, using as a bow a very big lie.

"After all," she said, "it is not necessary to bother Currita, for if she cannot give the ball, Izabel Mazacan has promised to do so."

The shot struck home, and Currita immediately replied: —

"And why can I not give it? Nothing would be easier. Fifteen days from now is Carnival. Would a large costume ball be proper, do you think?"

"It will cost you a fortune!" murmured Jacob, in as bad a humor as if he himself had to pay for it.

But the Duchess, who overheard the remark and who understood the economical ideas of Monsieur Alphonse, prevented Currita from hearing it by bursting out laughing; everybody looked at her in amazement.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing! Nothing! my dear. I was only thinking of the costume which Martinez's wife will select for the ball. It will doubtless be that of Teresa Panza, Sancho's wife."

CHAPTER III

Currita's constant interviews with Bonnat in Paris had awakened her artistic inclinations, and not content with the rôle of Mæcenas, she wished herself to cultivate the art of the divine Apelles. Accordingly she visited Meissonier, invited Charles Durand to dine, and having succeeded in inducing Raymond Madrazo to give her some lessons, out of the pure gallantry of a courteous gentleman, she returned to Madrid, leaving Rosa Bonheur feeling very small, and green with envy. Once at Court, she would be obliged to have a good-natured genius within call, a helping hand who would impart with his brushes life and expression to the dead and flat images which sprang from her artist's palette. This want was finally supplied by Celestino Reguera, a famous painter in water-colors of the Sevillian school, of the class who prefer the correct to the grand, and who think more of Watteau's landscapes than of the sibyls of Michael Angelo. Celestino's brush flew in and out of Currita's canvases with such frequency and liberty that the latter, upon finishing her pictures, could well repeat what the acolyte of long ago said, " The priest and I gave him the sacraments."

But, besides her artistic glory, Currita, as a woman of fashion, was more interested in the frame which would surround it; introducing into her house for this reason a most luxurious studio worthy of Fortuny or Pradilla, Delaroche or Makart. It was a vast room with studied oriental and zenith lights, and was over-stocked with artistic and archæological treasures, which upon Beauvais and Gobelin tapestries covered the walls, filled all the tables, and left scarcely a spot free to tread without stumbling against something to admire. There were antique bronzes, rare porcelains, Pompeiian flower-pots with tropical plants, Arabian, Persian, and Roman lamps, — one of the latter a

facsimile of the celebrated *di capo d'anno* of the Vatican Museum, — busts, pictures, statues, helmets, swords, weapons, and complete sets of armor of various epochs, like loose pages from the world's history, about Currita's easel, which, placed in a convenient light, seemed to receive a reflection of heaven's splendor, which the cunning rogue Celestino Reguera assured her was the very same which in former times the group of the Nine Muses had shed upon the foreheads of Rafael, Velasquez, and Titian.

Guarding the door on either side, were two manikins dressed as kings-at-arms of the sixteenth century, with gigantic shields, and genuine dalmatics of violet velvet, embroidered with figures of castles and lions; while directly opposite, at the other end of the room and in a sort of high, wide, and deep alcove, reached by ascending three white marble steps, was a Turkish divan, strewn with soft velvet and satin cushions; the floor of the alcove was covered by a genuine Persian carpet, while the ceiling and walls were decorated with Roman and Pompeiian mosaics, Egyptian bas-reliefs, and brilliant Moorish tiles. Here was kept the narghile, the gift of Sidi-Mohammed-Vargas, the Moorish ambassaador, and upon artistic little Fez tables, scarcely two hands high, were numerous other pipes, with which Jacob was teaching Currita how to enjoy the voluptuous sleep of the hasheesh, and which had caused Diogenes to designate the houri of this paradise by the graphical name of the " monkey Jenny."

Hiding away in a corner, as if taking refuge there, was another small easel placed between a miniature of Byron's statue, presented to the city of Turin by Pozzi, and a carved chest, of the fifteenth century, supposed to have belonged to Isabella the Catholic. Here, always silent, taciturn, timid, and suspicious, Paquito Lujan also painted under the direction of Celestino Reguera, who really found in the child the artistic talent lacking in the mother.

Great was the discussion that took place in this temple of the arts three days after the reunion of intimate friends

at the diplomat's house. Currita, seated before an exquisite round table with top of Mexican onyx, was examining a large number of copper-plate designs which Celestino Reguera was showing her, and which she in turn passed on to Jacob and Tonito Cepeda. The latter was a most elegant good-for-nothing, as great a connoisseur in horses as Teseo's son, and an amateur in everything that was art, being worthy for his exquisite taste, and as a representative in Spain of good Parisian form, his grateful country should, by an act of Parliament, endow him with a pension. Tonito Cepeda was more than *chic*, more than *psehutt ;* he was *v'lan*, *tschock*. But the poor young gentleman, incapable of fixing a price for the innumerable consultations thrust upon him on all sides, wandered about laden with debts, and without a cent to his name.

The question which Currita had submitted the day before to his enlightened intellect was most important, and worthy to be arbitrated by an areopagus of elegants, just as Domitian, in former times, submitted to the decision of the Senate what should be the proper kind of sauce for a turbot stew. The lady once having decided to give this costume ball and great feast on a broad basis, at which Tyrians and Trojans would dance *pêle-mêle*, petty personages who figured in the Directory, and plebeian peasants raised by the Revolution, it was necessary to invent something novel and startling, which would be the grand *coup* of the feast, and which would leave the poor plebeians, the Martinez and their clique, gaping with astonishment, — the spurious guests, as Uncle Frasquito would have said, whom Currita would take very good care to sweep from her salons as soon as the charitable undertaking of helping the wounded soldiers of the North should have thinned their fat purses.

The minuet, quadrille, the *pavana*, the *saraband*, and the *chacona* [1] were already played out, and had served a thousand times in aristocratic salons as a protest of refined Spanish patriotism against the intrusive Don Amadeo.

[1] Spanish dances. — Tr.

Celestino Reguera suggested the idea of representing a Spanish allegory, in which couples of ladies and gentlemen would display the costumes characteristic of the different provinces.

This project was rejected by Currita.

"Heavens! Reguera," she said. "It would look like a course in geography!"

Tonito Cepeda glanced disdainfully at the little painter, and proposed in his turn one of those spectacles which distinguish the epoch in which they occur, — that of imitating the Princess of Segan's unique idea, who revived Œsop's fables in Paris by giving a large costume ball, at which she received her guests dressed as a peacock, and to which all those invited went in costumes each representing some little animal. He, Tonito Cepeda, had attracted much attention in his elegant costume as a green frog. The idea was not new, but it quite captivated Currita. She would have been delighted to go dressed as a white cat with rose-colored boots.

Jacob, however, with the prudence and moderation which characterized all his dealings in regard to Currita's expenses, from the time he put his hand up to the elbow in her coffers, decisively rejected the project, by imposing rather than suggesting another plan, more economical and also much newer. They would give two quadrilles representing the parts of a game of chess, in white and black, and would execute a figure by themselves in the form of a *contra-danza*. Louis Fonseca, his assistant at the Legation, had seen them given like this in Cochin China, at the time of the festivities in honor of Phara-Narodon, King of Cambodia. The project was accepted with disdainful condescension by Tonito, and with perfect submission by Currita. Celestino Reguera was charged to bring, the following day, designs for the gown of the lady who would represent the white queen, and also a superb set of chess, admirably made in Japan, whose large marble figures could be copied for the remaining costumes of the quadrille.

Currita hesitated in the selection of a model, but Jacob, with the delegated authority which he exercised in this house as Villamelon's intimate friend and fourth cousin to the Countess, made her quickly decide upon the least expensive among them.

Currita obeyed without making any observation, or replying a word. One could clearly see she was completely subject to this man, that he was master here, and that every one in the house, from Villamelon to Don Joselito and from the Countess herself to the humblest kitchen-maid, servilely obeyed his orders, divined his desires, and moulded their own wishes to his caprices. Only two beings, the weakest and most defenceless, Paquito and Lili, resisted the omnipotent will of the shameless parasite; the angelic instinct of both children always picturing him as a reptile basking in the sunlight, brilliant but loathsome.

One day, shortly after Jacob had ingratiated himself into the intimate friendship of the husband and wife, Currita was painting in her studio a portrait which one would have supposed to be that of Byron, her beloved poet, whose pictures, busts, and statues were distributed in all directions, but which was in reality Jacob's image, perfected by Reguera, his brow crowned with laurel, and the wide collar of his old-fashioned Scotch shirt open half way to the breast. The two children, standing on either side of their mother, were gazing open-eyed and in silence at the movement of the brush in the lady's hand, who, with a certain air of intimate complacency, gave the finishing touches to the graceful and vigorous neck of the make-believe Byron. Presently Lili, with that serious and meditative air common at times in children, said to her mother: —

"Mamma, why do you love Uncle Jacob so much?"

The Countess turned, surprised, leaning on her maul-stick, and changed color slightly; but, immediately recovering herself, she said with much affection: —

"And why should I not love him, child? He is my cousin and your uncle."

The child shook her little head, pouting doubtfully.

"Yes, I know. I also love Cousin Baptista and Cousin Charles; but not more than you and Paquito, — no, no, no!"

And she began to cry bitterly, with her heart contracted, hiding her beautiful little head on her mother's breast, as if seeking there what even the smallest swallow finds in the bottom of its nest, the warmth of maternal affection. Paquito said nothing, but blushed deeply, that holy carmine with which instinctive modesty tinges the features of innocence, and crushing between his fingers, without knowing it, a Roman amphora, a strange glass lachrymatory, which was on a table near-by, hid with a manly effort the large tears which gushed from his eyes.

On another occasion, some months later, when Currita's birthday, the 10th of October, and feast of St. Francis Borgia, was approaching, the two children were plotting together a conspiracy to give their mother a surprise. Paquito, whose remarkable talent for painting, especially portraits, was already beginning to reveal itself, had painted in pastels the portrait of his father, a deformed Villamelon, with a complexion like a carrot, and who seemed to have his left cheek swollen, but which was, notwithstanding, a more than mediocre likeness of the original. The most striking part of the portrait was the forehead and head, in which the child had faithfully copied his father's scanty locks of hair, parted in the middle, and forming over both ears two little horns, *à la* Napoleon III., which the artist's lack of skill had drawn out to an inconsiderable length. Lili, for her part, had made, with the help of Miss Buteffull, who was in the secret, a frame of Russian leather with raised flowers; and both uniting their work, the gift was complete. At the bottom of the portrait Miss Buteffull wrote in her best English handwriting: "To our dear mamma on her birthday," and both children signed it: "Lili, Paquito."

Oh! How splendid it was! It had cost so much too, and it was only natural that its authors should be rewarded by witnessing the whole of their mother's joyful surprise.

The eagerly looked-for day arrived, and Lili, hiding beneath her little fur cape the magnificent present, slyly stole with Paquito into their mother's studio. There the Countess used to come every day before breakfast, usually long past twelve o'clock, and it was the most appropriate time to take her by surprise.

On Currita's easel in front of the very picture she was painting, Paquito placed with great care his masterpiece. Then, laughing like little cherubs, with the agitation of great expectations and perfect confidence in the most sacred of affections, they ran hurriedly to hide themselves amid the innumerable knick-knacks which were concealed beneath an antique steel writing-desk by a large piece of tapestry representing some very large, withered, and ugly figures, "The Three Fates!" From here they could see the easel, with the portrait standing out in full view; and the two children, hiding closely, and squeezing up one against the other, contemplated their work.

"How well it looks!" said Lili.

Half an hour passed; Lili was beginning to get impatient, and stretched out her cramped legs.

"She is n't coming," she said.

"Hush, silly!"

A noise was heard; Lili nudged her brother and whispered, "There she comes!" and made herself as small as possible.

She in fact entered the room, but not alone. With her came Uncle Jacob, speaking of things they did not understand. How tiresome! debts that must be paid, creditors who wished to collect, a signature which must be tricked from Villamelon and placed at the bottom of a note three times contested, — a loan, a mere loan, payable upon the coming of the Restoration, when he would be able to collect the value of certain mysterious papers.

Jacob spoke with failing voice, and Currita, in gay spirits and thoroughly well satisfied, cheered him up by saying yes to everything, and by telling him not to worry. Presently she glanced at the easel.

"What is this?"

The children scarcely dared to breathe and squeezed up still closer to each other. A burst of laughter was now heard.

"Do you see what this is?"

Another laugh from Uncle Jacob, which echoed the first, and this time was heard: —

"The great idiot!"

Then they both began to laugh again, their Uncle Jacob and their mother, with a laugh which completely disconcerted the children, for it was not the gay, tender, and thankful laugh, brimming over with love and maternal tenderness, which they expected to hear, but a rude, mocking, shameless laugh, which reminded them, without their knowing why, of the laugh with which the bad women of the street insult each other.

"What an idea! Poor children! And how hideous the *babieca* is! He looks as if he had the toothache. How delicious!"

"And the boy has crowned him with a vengeance."

"True, indeed!"

Then there was an infamous tittering and whispering of half-uttered words; they snatched up something from a table and did something to the portrait, and once again those cruel laughs resounded. The children said nothing, but had shrunk away from each other, as if fearing to communicate their mutual impressions, remaining huddled up, quiet, and utterly speechless. A servant entered the studio, announcing that breakfast was served, and Jacob and Currita now left the room without having observed the children's presence. Paquito came out first from his hiding-place, with the air of a child who has felt in a nightmare a great weight upon him, which he cannot see, or touch, or understand, but which oppresses and annihilates him, and causes his heart to palpitate. Lili crept out next, and stood looking at her brother; both approached the portrait.

"Oh!" said Lili, disconsolately. "See what they have done!"

An infamous hand had traced with a piece of charcoal in the two little curls of the portrait a most sarcastic prolongation and a most villanous insult. The boy flushed crimson, and presently grew very pale. He seized the portrait, hid it under his coat, and walked towards the door without saying a word. Lili began to cry; Paquito then turned and kissed her.

"Don't cry, silly."

He was not crying, but was very serious, with his little nostrils pale, mouth dry, and lips white. He raised his finger and said, looking down at the carpet: —

"Be sure and say nothing to Mademoiselle. Do you understand? Nothing, not a word. I am going to my room."

And the poor little fellow went to his room, and there, in that solitude, with no one to console him, wept floods of burning tears; for he felt a profound grief without understanding it, which lacerated his heart like a hidden cancer which consumes the inward parts, — a feeling, if we may so express it, of indescribable shame, which made him hide his face, wet with tears, on his little white pillow. But why should he feel this shame, being good himself, loving his father and mother, and adoring Lili, always having the highest marks too, and saying his prayers every day to God and the Blessed Virgin, who was there before him in a frame with the Child in her arms? He grew somewhat calmer. Oh! how happy must have been that Divine Child to be able to call this pure Virgin "Mother"!

A very few days afterwards Currita suddenly withdrew her son from the College of Our Lady of Remembrance. The boy was now twelve years of age, and the reverend rector had told his father on one of his visits that the time had come to prepare him for his first communion. Currita was not present, and Villamelon hastened to approve the idea. He wished above all things that his boy should be a Christian.

"For you must know, reverend father, we come by this naturally. My wife is related to St. Francis Borgia, and I

myself to St. Theresa, and, on the Benedetti side also, to St. Francis Caracciola."

Ah! the Villamelons had always been pious. Every year they made a *novena* to San Roque, intercessor of the plague-stricken, at Quintanar de Oreja, where they had possessions. He was patron of the church also, and had the power to appoint the pastor. "Do you understand me, reverend father?"

The rector understood him only too well, and confiding in St. Francis Caracciola, advanced another suggestion. The day appointed for the first communion was the nineteenth of March, St. Joseph's day, and it seemed to him natural, appropriate, and it would be most edifying, if he, the father of the child, and the Countess, his mother, would accompany him to the sacred table. To this Villamelon also agreed.

"Quite so, reverend father; I will receive communion with my son! My sainted mother always said, 'It is just as well to show God certain attentions.' You understand? And moreover, these family scenes affect one. I aspire to a patriarchal family. My mother was a saint, and my wife is an angel, who always defers to me, and has no will of her own. 'Curra, do this,' 'Curra, do that,' and it is done. You understand me, reverend father?"

The rector, who was scrupulous, did not dare say he understood, for fear of infringing on the truth, and Villamelon continued, with the air of a monarch who offers to stand godfather to a beggar: —

"So, of course, reverend father, we will both receive communion with the boy; and I, you may rest assured, will come in full uniform."

The rector, who had had much experience and could foresee things a long way off, told him it would be better for them to go to confession before coming to the College, as the fathers there were always much pressed for time, and perhaps might not be able to hear them.

"Certainly, reverend father, certainly; I have my regular confessor; have never confessed to another,— Father Pareja;

an excellent man, a saint, reverend father, a saint! You understand me?"

The reverend rector understood him so well that he was almost on the point of bursting into a laugh. Father Pareja, the Marquis's regular confessor, had been dead ten years.

Villamelon returned to his house thoroughly well satisfied, and told Currita of the engagement he had made. She, with the rapid perception of her perfect understanding, at once realized the serious nature of the engagement, and a horrible idea, that of a sacrilege, crossed her mind like a bird of ill-omen. She stopped, however, frightened before it, for the bad Spanish woman is rarely impious. In the depths of her heart she always believes and fears, and a sacrilege terrifies less the false devotee than the woman openly scandalous. Her fruitful imagination at once suggested to her another expedient, worthy of the Superioress of Port Royal, the mystic Jansenist, Sophia Arnauld.

"What on earth are you talking about, Fernandito? A child twelve years of age receive communion! What an idea! It is a piece of irreverence which I cannot permit."

Villamelon opened his mouth, amazed.

"But my dear Curra, don't you understand? The reverend rector says so."

"Well, I say no. No one receives communion in France until the age of fourteen at least!"

"But as we are in Spain —"

"Listen, Fernandito, my love. I have told you never to talk anywhere. This is not a question of climate, do you understand? So that to-morrow you must return to the College and tell this reverend rector in my name that I will not permit Paquito to receive communion without being fully prepared. So that settles it!"

In vain the reverend rector alleged that the child was thoroughly well prepared, and that this rigorous French custom was a remnant of Jansenism, which the teachings of the Church and the zeal of the clergy had already completely obliterated; it being a sin and a veritable crime to

deprive, for such a length of time, an innocent soul of the help of a sacrament which works *ex opere operato*.

Villamelon shrugged his shoulders, not well understanding to what *operas* he was referring. Currita's astute scruples would not be downed, and the reverend rector, suspecting the hypocritical pretext, said most emphatically that if the boy continued at College he must receive Holy Communion on St. Joseph's day without his parents' consent. Currita upon this became most indignant, and, in order to avoid the horrible profanation, hastened to withdraw the boy.

It was now that the innocent child began to give his candid attention to the strange scenes passing in his house. The poor boy, left almost always alone, took refuge in the stables, where he passed the greater part of the day among the coachmen and stable-boys, listening to conversations which at first made him blush, but afterwards made him laugh; so that his modesty, that species of delicate skin which the purity of the soul preserves, gradually became hardened. The dwarf Don Joselito amused him exceedingly, and to him he went with mysterious doubts, which the malicious pygmy hastened to solve, making clear to him secrets as curious as those which the impure and loathsome Asmodeus revealed to his pupil Cojuelo, the imp. The boy began putting two and two together.

There now came to the Court a famous French dramatic company, and Currita had a box reserved for the season, so the children could go every night to the theatre. The little ones spoke such broken and provincial French that it was necessary that they should learn to speak correctly by hearing the pure Parisian accent. In this school of accent and prosody the child continued putting two and two together, and one day, after a long conversation with Don Joselito, in which the wicked dwarf bargained for all that his covetousness could expect from the boy's generous soul, if he could succeed in initiating him, once for all, into the labyrinths of vice, the boy made his last calculation. From this time his character changed; he had seen more than he expected

to see, and a great shame, clear and distinct, and a ferocious hatred, implacable and deep-rooted, were born simultaneously in his heart, the former preventing him from raising his eyes before the humblest servant, and the latter making him sharpen in silence the edge of his rancor, until the time should come when he would be a man, and could command in his house.

His father inspired him with disdain, his mother with aversion; but he continued to worship Lili, the only angel left in the house. As far as Jacob was concerned, he avoided him as much as possible, and more than once Currita, with a feeling of real fear, surprised in the eyes of the boy a look of profound hatred which shone between his long, blond lashes like an unsheathed sword. He now devoted himself with ardor to painting, and passed whole hours sketching at his easel, with Lili seated by his side, as if she were his guardian angel. Thus they were surprised on the day when Currita came into the room with those who were to draw out the plan of the costume ball. The children, resisting their curiosity, sat quiet and motionless in their corner. But when Celestina Reguera began to place upon the chess-board the magnificent chess-men, and Jacob began to explain the picturesque manner in which the persons to represent them must move in order to play their parts, Lili could not resist the temptation, and approached the group on tiptoe, making silent signs to her brother to follow. It was all so pretty!

The boy finally decided, and got up a moment to look on, with his palette in one hand and maul-stick in the other. He had grown very much, was about to complete his thirteenth year, and promised to be most handsome in face as well as exceedingly graceful and robust in form. He approached the group, smiling at Lili, and began to watch what was going on, standing on tiptoe behind his mother, and at Jacob's very side. Suddenly, in the midst of his explanation the latter made a brusque movement with his arm, rudely knocking the boy's palette out of his hand,

which, falling upon Jacob's left sleeve, completely besmeared it with paint. The boy retreated a step, his face livid.

Jacob turned angrily, a harsh word impatiently bursting from his lips, with the obscene grossness which is frequently concealed beneath the polite social manners of certain men, and which escapes them spontaneously when anger or undue familiarity excites them. The child, upon hearing him, glanced at his mother and at Jacob angrily, making a menacing gesture in which one could see the man palpitating beneath the fragile form of the boy.

"Well," exclaimed Jacob, defying him. "Nobody told you to come here. Go away!"

The boy's eyes became bloodshot, and he pounded so hard on the floor with his maul-stick that it broke in two.

"I don't choose to do so!" he cried.

Jacob made a motion to throw himself upon him, but Currita, alarmed, stopped him. The boy's voice, hoarse with anger, laconic and dry like one in a fever, cried out again: —

"I don't choose to do so! Go away yourself. You can't give orders here! This is not your house!"

And he stopped, panting and voiceless in the midst of an ominous silence, similar to that which reigns during a lull in a tempest. Jacob had turned, with his fists clenched, stammering between his lips white with anger: —

"He is spoiling for a whipping —"

He did not finish his sentence; with the strength and rapidity which characterizes the lion in its attack, and the sanguinary avidity with which a tiger's cub springs upon its first prey, the boy sprang upon Jacob, digging his nails into his throat, butting him in the face with his head and kicking him all over his body with his robust little legs, which seemed to have muscles of steel. Jacob, surprised, repulsed the attack, disengaging the boy with a powerful effort of his vigorous arms and threw him far away from him, as if he had been a bag of sand; his head struck against an enormous Japanese jar, of antique bronze, which emitted a metallic sound.

Lili, her eyes dilated with terror, was by his side in a moment, and had raised between her two hands his livid little head. Celestino caught him up in his arms and carried him hurriedly from the room. Lili, still kneeling on the carpet, held out her little blood-stained hands to her mother, stammering out with the dull vibration of uncontrollable terror:—

"Blood! Mamma! Blood!"

CHAPTER IV

Pedro Lopez almost succumbed beneath the plethora of his inspiration, upon giving an account in the *Fleur-de-Lis* of the grand ball on a broad basis which took place Carnival Monday at the house of their Excellencies the Marquis and Marchioness of Villamelon. There are situations and spectacles which one understands and instinctively admires, but may not have the power to describe or comment upon. In such cases the greatest poet and most masterful writer is he who exhales the most natural cry and most vehement exclamation.

Pedro Lopez deemed it best to describe the magic ball by imprinting at the top of a sheet of paper, a fathomless "Oh! ! ! !" and then leaving all the rest in blank. Towards dawn he withdrew into the *serre* and was hurriedly jotting down notes, when Butron, exhausted and satisfied, like the chief after the victory, approached him; his well formed legs, which his knee-breeches and black silk stockings fitted to perfection, advancing with a movement that caused his graceful Venetian cape to undulate with juvenile jauntiness. With a solemn intonation and an air of profound mystery he whispered, poking the end of his nose into Pedro Lopez's left ear:—

"Lopez! Be very careful! Your account will insure our triumph. Let all these *parvenus* see their names in the

Fleur-de-Lis, extolled by the reporter of our elegant salons, and they are ours forever. Away with scruples! Martinez's wife must be beautiful; Garcia Gomez's wife enchanting; she who is coming this way a prodigy and the Victoria Colonna of the age."

And with an attentive and obsequious air he hastened to clasp the hand of the Victoria Colonna of the nineteenth century, a fat old body, a metre and a half in height and twelve *arrobes* in weight, dressed as Sappho, with a crown of myrtle on her head, a lyre of gilded brass in her hand, and upon her flat nose — just Heaven! — a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. It was her Excellency Señora Doña Paulina Gomez de Rebollar de Gonzalez de Hermosilla, an eminent literary person and famous poetess, upon whom Butron had cast his eye for the Secretary of the association of ladies. The ball had really been a success, and Butron qualified it as a miraculous catch; the charitable bait of helping the wounded soldiers had caught all hearts, and the desired fusion being realized, and the heterogeneous *personnel* of the association of ladies recruited, it only now remained to organize them. Butron, triumphant and rejuvenated, congratulated some, encouraged others, and multiplied himself in all directions, fishing-rod in hand; but between the influence of the supper and the current of general satisfaction, his head, so firm, was on the point of becoming unhinged to the extent of conceiving the idea of inviting her Excellency Sra. Doña Paulina Gomez de Rebollar de Gonzalez de Hermosilla to dance the cotillon. A strange rumor which began to circulate through the drawing-rooms stopped him on the brink of this precipice, deeper than the turbulent sea, tomb of the real Sappho, at the foot of the rock of Leucades.

It was whispered that somewhere in a private room a dispute of honor had taken place between two personages of high standing. Butron, terrified, ran to investigate the rumor for himself, fearful lest this unforeseen incident should dissolve the ties of union knotted with so much labor. He approached a group, in the midst of which Gorito Sardona,

dressed as a pawn in chess, was holding forth: He was thoroughly acquainted with the whole affair; for he had witnessed it all, and one of the disputants was Uncle Frasquito.

"*Polaina!*" exclaimed Diogenes. "And with what will the duel be fought, — scissors, or needles?"

"Something between the two," replied Gorito. And he continued relating, with a great many exaggerations and much mystery, that the other disputant was Sir Robert Beltz, a captain of the guards attached to the English Embassy, — a very phlegmatic and inquisitive person, accustomed to investigate the whys and wherefores of everything, methodical and orderly to the point of laughing in the morning at the jokes heard the night before.

Upon hearing Sir Robert Beltz's name mentioned, Diogenes made a motion as if assailed by a strong temptation to laugh, but nevertheless he controlled himself and listened seriously to the young man's narration. It happened that Uncle Frasquito had observed, with surprise at first, then with suspicion, and lastly with real alarm, that Sir Robert Beltz was following him about everywhere, without losing sight of him for an instant. At first he thought it was due to the admiration excited by his magnificent costume as Great Mandarin, quite capable of awakening the Mikado's envy, for Uncle Frasquito was the happy mortal who had had the signal honor of figuring as white king, by Currita's side, in the famous game of chess just enacted. Upon its conclusion, however, he found himself, amid the frequent crushes of the ball, constantly running across the Englishman, who always rubbed up against him with most disagreeable persistency, actually shaking him upon two occasions.

"Such thumps!" — said the victim in his chapter of complaints; "simply horrible! Nothing more nor less than if he wanted to see if I sounded hollow or not!"

Later in the evening, while the venerable Mandarin was bending somewhat forward, conversing with some ladies who were seated, Sir Robert, hidden by the crowd, approached

him with much precaution, and without any provocation whatsoever, or any justifiable reason, zounds! ran a needle, with British vigor, its full length into the calf of his left leg.

"The great idiot!" exclaimed Diogenes, "I told him it was the right one; the right leg is the cork one."

And in the midst of general astonishment and laughter, Diogenes then explained the enigma. While the chess quadrilles were being danced, Sir Robert Beltz, standing by Diogenes' side, was most attentively watching Uncle Frasquito, who, very pompous and complacent in his character as king, moved with repose and majesty over the carpet of red and white checks which represented the chess-board.

"Who is that youth?" he asked of Diogenes.

"Youth? *Polaina!* He is two years older than myself, and I am sixty-three; you can calculate accordingly."

Sir Robert's face of perpetual astonishment lengthened, and Diogenes increased his amazement by adding most seriously: —

"There, as you see him, he is made up of thirty-two false articles."

"Oh, Sir Diogenes! you are a very exaggerated Andalusian!"

"You do not believe me? Well, then, just count them." And he began to enumerate the components which the legend attributed to Uncle Frasquito, concluding by putting the cork leg into the catalogue.

Sir Robert, amazed, and thinking he had discovered a new specimen of elastic man, with which to endow the British Museum, set about applying his experimental method to this new find, and received in exchange a spontaneous rap from Uncle Frasquito's mandarin fan, which in the irascibility of his excited nerves the latter discharged upon the top of Sir Robert's head. No blood was shed, however; Currita, very indignant at Diogenes' rude joke, intervened, and put an end to the affair, by taking Sir Robert's arm and making a tour of the *serre*, charging Uncle Frasquito beforehand to invite all those who had taken part in the two quadrilles,

black and white, to dine with her the following day. Fernandito wished to photograph them in both groups, in their respective costumes, so that afterwards a large engraving might be published in the *Ilustracion Española y Americana*.

The dinner was most original. The idea ad occurred to Currita to have her cook prepare a Japanese *menu*, and all seated themselves at the table in the same Japanese costumes in which they had been photographed in different groups and attitudes in Fernandito's studio. At dessert Uncle Frasquito was seized with a new and most happy idea, a veritable inspiration, born amid the vapors of his gratified stomach and received with enthusiasm by all present. It occurred to him, — in order to immortalize this famous ball and to perpetuate the memory of these gorgeous costumes, so as never to separate from its queen the aristocratic Japanese quadrille recruited by himself in the salons of the Veloz Club — to prolong the masquerade by transforming it into a species of guard of honor, which would wait upon and accompany Currita everywhere, all wearing some particular badge which would distinguish them from the rest of mortals. Currita was enchanted with the idea, and, as a distinctive mark of the new order of knighthood, fixed upon a blue cravat, color of the famous league of the Countess of Salisbury, which, as the story goes, gave Edward III. the idea of founding the ancient and most noble Order of the Garter. The lady gayly offered to present to all the badge of the new order, and sent to each an exquisite blue cravat of rich Japanese silk, fastened with pearl scarf-pins, the stones all taken from a magnificent collar which had belonged to her mother. Uncle Frasquito was elected by acclamation grand master of the illustrious knights, who took the title of "Currita's Musketeers." Madrid's caustic satire, the most cruel perhaps in the world, soon made them change the name. Carmen Tagle, having represented the black queen in the game of chess, was profoundly indignant because no such guard had been formed in her honor, and began to designate that

of her rival, from its Japanese origin, by the name of "Mikado."

"Indeed! Yes! that is the very name!" exclaimed the Countess of Mazacan, enthusiastically, upon hearing it. "The natural and logical guard for the 'monkey Jenny' should be a body of 'Micos.'"[1] And from that time forth the body of Musketeers went by the name of "Currita's Micos."

Uncle Frasquito also obtained in this skirmish another nickname, thereby increasing the long catalogue of them which the envy and malignity of high Madrid society lavish in such profusion upon every one. The Duchess of Bara had discovered in him a great likeness, dressed as a Mandarin, to a portrait of Pan-Hoei-Pan, a celebrated Chinese man of letters, which had been published in the *Ilustracion*, and Pan-Hoei-Pan he was called from that time forth by this immense phalanx of his spurious and legitimate nephews and nieces.

Jacob, with the avarice of his egotistical and rapacious nature, and the despotic authority which he exercised over Currita in the moderation of all her expenses, bitterly reproached her for this waste of pearls, squandered away upon her *Micos*. She, blinded by the densest and most effective of all bandages, and in constant fear of seeing herself deprived of the friendship and counsels of this man, who filled the shallow cavity of her heart and satisfied her immense vanity, resolved, in order to conciliate him, to present him upon his birthday, the thirtieth of April, a magnificent gift. Accordingly, with Reguera's help, she colored a large photograph of herself taken in her rich costume as Japanese queen, and ordered designs for a magnificent frame, to be made by Marzo and Ansorena, of gold, silver, and precious stones. The designs, however, did not satisfy her; the thirtieth of April was approaching, and alarmed at the shortness of the time, she almost despaired of seeing her project realized. Celestino Reguera now sug-

[1] Apes. — Tr.

gested she should buy an antique frame of embossed silver work, then on sale at the Exposition of Retrospective Art, which had formerly belonged to a certain well known ducal house. Currita struck her forehead with the palm of her hand.

"How silly I am!" she said. "It will not be necessary; for I have here in this very house, within a stone's throw, something better and richer than anything I could buy."

With the vivacity of a girl who hastens to gratify a cherished caprice, Currita traversed the vast rooms of the palace, in which luxury and comfort were everywhere conspicuous, until she came to a certain part of the house which, in former times, had been a wing of honor, but was now inhabited by the servants. In a species of rotunda, adorned with antique painted frescos, now completely discolored and blurred, was a large oaken door with bronze ornaments and beautifully sculptured panels. In vain the Countess attempted to lift with her delicate little hands the enormous chiselled bolt; the key was gone. She then approached the entrance of a corridor which led to the kitchen, and cried out impatiently: —

"Germán! Basil! Is no one there?"

Germán rushed out in great haste, much astonished to see the Countess in this part of the house.

"Where is the key to this door?" she demanded.

Germán shrugged his shoulders. Who could tell what had become of that key?

"Well, go look for it, instantly!" cried Currita. "Ask Don Joselito, inquire in the office and everywhere! Heavens! How tiresome!" And much annoyed she tapped impatiently on the floor with her foot, while Germán flew through the house looking for the key. After a lapse of fifteen minutes he at last returned, bringing with him a very large key covered with rust, with a parchment card attached to it on which was written the word "Oratory." The key entered the lock with a grating sound, and Germán tried in vain to turn it; he was obliged to draw it out again, rub

the sides of the lock with oil, and introduce a stick into the key-hole, finally succeeding, after the sixth or seventh attempt, in turning it. He then gave two or three most vigorous shoves with his whole body against the side of the door, which opened slowly, letting a sudden blast of damp air escape; the interior was dark.

"Wait here!" said Currita, with a certain little air of fright.

And she advanced, holding her hands out before her and with her eyes closed in order to accustom herself to the gloom. A few streaks of pale light came in through two high and wide side-windows, both hung with long curtains of red damask, faded and white with dust. Currita tried to draw one of them aside, violently pulling the silk cord which hung along the side of the wall; but the curtain rustled without moving, and the cord, no doubt rotten, broke from above and fell twisting itself about Currita, like a long and slender serpent. The lady screamed, and a cloud of thick dust fell down at the same time, while two bats flew out from among the folds of the curtains and began to circle about from one side of the room to the other.

"Germán!" cried Currita, half dead with fright.

And trying to conceal her sudden terror upon seeing him enter, she added, fleeing from the ill-fated cord as if it were indeed a serpent: —

"Heavens, man, how slow you are! See if you can draw this curtain." Only after the greatest labor and with the utmost care, pulling both cords at once, could Germán succeed in drawing aside the other curtain, while, frightened by the light, a hen now jumped from the altar, and two or three chickens began to run cackling about, disappearing through a small half-opened door to the right of the main altar. Currita looked at Germán stupefied, and the latter, scarcely able to restrain a burst of laughter, which would have seemed to him wanting in respect to his illustrious mistress, answered very gravely: —

"The cook shuts up the chickens to be killed in here, so as to have them more conveniently at hand."

"But how does he get them in, with the door so barred?"

"Through the other little door of the sacristy, which communicates with the kitchen."

"Ah!"

The light penetrated through the dirty and dusty window-panes faintly and as if ashamed, but it was sufficient to illumine this desolate picture of impious neglect. The oratory was a beautiful chapel with high, frescoed dome, which had been constructed with great taste and richness towards the end of the seventeenth century. In those times it was tapestried from top to bottom with rich red damask hangings, which now hung in dirty tatters from the walls, full of stains and bruises. At certain distances along the walls, enclosed in rich frames now rotting, were yellowish parchments, upon which were inscribed the innumerable graces and privileges conceded by the Holy See to the founders of the chapel. The rich sculpturing of the somewhat gaudy altar-piece was hidden beneath a thick layer of dust and cobwebs, and the various images which occupied the niches seemed to have acquired that livid pallor which is an indication of supreme fright in human beings. Upon the altar, the slab was broken, the tabernacle sunken in, and two beautiful angels on either side of it, which formerly sustained silver lamps, now raised their empty clenched hands as if announcing the anger of the Lord. In the lower part of the chapel, upon a ruined confessional and various broken kneeling-stools, was heaped a lot of old rubbish, useless furniture, and the stage-settings of a theatre, in which the Countess, many years before, had represented some famous living pictures. Over the two steps of the chancel, at the left of the altar, was a sort of crystal closet inserted in the wall, where relics were kept. Here Currita directed her footsteps, bidding Germán to open the door. In the lower part were various half-opened cases, which contained sacred vessels, and, thrown into a corner, rumpled and bundled up,

was a black velvet chasuble, richly embroidered in gold, which displayed in elegant raised work the coat of arms of the house. The sight of it instantly recalled to Currita the last mass celebrated in this profaned spot. It had been fifteen years before, when the old Marchioness of Villamelon, Fernandito's mother, was laid out there. Even yet, yonder amid the heaped-up débris of the theatre, could be seen pieces of the catafalque which had held her body. Currita felt a chill of fright, and looked instinctively towards the spot in which the old Marchioness had been accustomed to hear mass every day. There was her velvet chair, all sunken in and destroyed, and before it her kneeling-stool, whose moth-eaten cushions still preserved the impression of her knees and arms. Currita turned her back brusquely, as if fearing to see the pale and angry ghost of the old lady suddenly appear.

The upper part of the closet was lined with red velvet, in a very good state of preservation, and upon little cushions of the same material were various silver relics, containing the bones of saints. In a corner, standing against the wall, was an object of more than a third the length of the closet, enveloped in a cover of dark morocco leather, all gnawed by rats. It was this object that Currita seized, holding it on account of its great weight with both hands, and immediately afterwards left the chapel in great haste, as terrified as if she had committed a robbery in a sacred place.

Alone again in her studio, when she had removed the ruined cover, she was struck with astonishment; for this was an artistic treasure of great value, a frame of chiselled or raised filigree silver work, a most remarkable and noble piece of execution of the sixteenth century, which had, sculptured on the pedestal of one of its thousand beautiful little figures, the illustrious name of Enrique de Arfé, maker of the Ostensorium of Cordova and of the so-called antique cross. This marvel, however, served as a frame to an extremely strange and insignificant object; upon a ground of white satin, covered by transparent bevelled glass, was simply a bit of old

rag, a piece of coarse and worn gray sackcloth. The frame was secured at the back by a large silver clasp, fastened down by tiny screws, which not without great difficulty did Currita succeed in drawing out. Within, bound together in white taffeta silk, now yellow with age, were two documents written in a clear handwriting of the sixteenth century, which could be perfectly deciphered without difficulty. Upon one was written: "Piece of the cowl of the venerable servant of God, Friar Alonzo de Lujan, who died in odor of sanctity in his convent of Talavera de la Reina, January 23, 1590." And on the following line, with the candid self-confidence of the grandees of that epoch, was the simple signature, *Doña Catalina.*

"Ah!" exclaimed Currita, very much astonished. "So this belonged to that —"

And her eyes sought out, among the thousand treasures which adorned her studio, an admirable head painted by Pantoja, of a dead Capuchin monk, in whose countenance beamed that serene calm which death imprints as a sign of predestination upon the brows of the just. That venerable head was in fact the portrait of Friar Alonzo of Lujan, brother of the fourth Marquis of Paracuellar, and had been transferred years before from the oratory to the drawing-rooms of the palace, not as an object of piety, but as a monument of art.

Upon the other paper was copied this clause from the testament of Doña Leonor Manrique de la Cerda, dividing among her relations a habit which had belonged to her first cousin, the venerable Father Alonzo of Lujan, Capuchin monk:[1] "My Lady the Duchess del Infantado will select the piece she prefers, and will give a piece to the Count of Salvatierra, another piece to the Count of Montigo, and another to my niece Doña Catalina, Marchioness of Paracuellar; the girdle will be given to the Count of Salinas,

[1] This clause is literally taken from the quoted testament, without other variation than that of introducing into it the assumed name of the Marchioness of Paracuellar.

my nephew, who will keep and venerate as I did a relic of such a holy and venerable man; another small relic which I also have of the said Father Alonzo I send to my Lady the Duchess, and beg of her to give it, when her Excellency thinks proper, to the Count del Cid; and any other piece which her Excellency may select must be given to the Duke of Bajar, to whose house the said Friar Alonzo was much attached."

Currita was amazed. It seemed incredible that all these good people, in reality great lords and ladies, many of them so famous in history, should divide among them like precious stones the pieces of a poor friar's coarse habit. How the times change! The good Doña Catalina had spent a small fortune in having a frame made for her little piece of cowl, without having the faintest suspicion that it would save Currita from expending a considerable sum of money.

With a quick movement Currita shook the relic out, without touching it, and afterwards inserted the photograph in its place. The effect was marvellous; and by only cutting the edges a little, it would fit as well as if it had been made to order. Currita complacently studied the effect, holding the portrait away from her; but the hand with which she held it brushed against the bit of the monk's habit, and snatching it away suddenly as if she had touched a live coal, she glanced timidly and fearfully at Pantoja's magnificent head, which so admirably expressed upon the canvas the imposing and serene calm of death. With the same documents which contained the authentic testamental clause, she picked up Father Alonzo's relic without touching it, and with a gesture which expressed repugnance as well as fear, disgust as well as respect, threw the whole thing into a dainty little waste-basket. Immediately she repented her action, having heard that sacred things should always be burned. Again she gathered it all up in the same manner, so as to avoid touching the relic, and now threw it into a fireplace, in which a fire blazed.

Without being able to help it she again cast a rapid glance

full of fear and suspicion at the pale head of the dead monk. A strong odor of burning rags, sour and disagreeable, instantly diffused itself throughout the room. At this moment Villamelon entered in a very cheerful and contented frame of mind. He had just returned from Charmartin de la Rosa, where, at his beautiful country-seat of Miracielos, he was enthusiastically trying the artificial incubation of hen's-eggs.

"Heavens, my dear! what a horrible smell!" he exclaimed, stopping in the doorway. "What have you been burning? Why, it smells like the infernal regions."

Currita, much annoyed, became very serious, even turning a trifle pale.

"Listen, Fernandito; don't talk nonsense. I don't like joking about the things of the other world." And she stole another furtive and fearful glance at the imposing head of Father Alonzo, as if the words had fallen from his lips.

"But, my dear Curra, — can't you understand? Call some one to open a window. There is a horrible odor here of burning rubbish or something."

"But it is nothing, man; an old paint-brush which I threw into the fireplace. So no more about it. Have you seen Lili?"

Villamelon gave himself a blow on the forehead with the palm of his hand.

"My dear! I forgot all about it."

"But did I not tell you to go and see her?" cried Currita, angrily.

"Well, my dear, I forgot to do so. What is to be done about it?"

"Heavens! what a man! He remembers to go see his hens, and forgets to visit his daughter."

For the reader is still ignorant of the fact that neither of the children was at home. Four days after the scene referred to in the preceding chapter Currita made up her mind and also convinced Fernandito that, as she could not dedicate herself exclusively to the education of the children, as had been her desire, the best thing would be to send Lili to

the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Chamartin, and Paquito to the College which the Jesuit fathers then had in Guichon near the Pyrenees. Neither she nor Jacob remembered that in this same college Alfonso Tellez-Ponce, the son of the latter, was also being educated. Villamelon, very sorry for his fault, promised to rectify it the following day, when he should again have to go to Chamartin, to inspect the progress of the artificial incubation, which at this time claimed his whole time and attention.

CHAPTER V

The line formed by the carriages in front of the Marquis of Butron's house extended nearly the entire length of Calle de Hortaleza, crossed the avenue of San Luis, and lost itself in the avenue of La Montera. They advanced slowly, stopping at every moment, their little doors opening and shutting noisily, and then moved on to take up their stand in the plaza of Santa Barbara. The passers-by stopped surprised, and many stood watching this long procession of ladies, rare in Madrid at the early hour of three o'clock in the afternoon. The Government was apparently alarmed, for several officers of police walked to and fro on the sidewalk opposite the palace, mingling with the on-lookers, or entering into conversation with the coachmen and footmen, who gossiped among themselves, from their coach-boxes, calling each other, according to classic custom, by the illustrious names of their respective masters. The ladies sprang lightly from their carriages, passed through the large front door, ascended the carpeted staircase, and lost themselves with a conspiring air in that wide, theatrical drawing-room, in former times famous for having had *El hombre de mundo* represented in it by Don Ventura de la Vega, and the rehearsals of *El pelo de la dehesa*, conducted by Breton de los Herreros in person. A most prudent half-light reigned

throughout the room, a premature twilight, which concealed with paternal indulgence under cover of its mysterious shadows the great deteriorations in the decorations, not capable of honorably resisting the impertinent light of three o'clock in the afternoon.

To an outsider this would seem to be the humming of a colossal beehive, in which two hundred women were buzzing at the same time, amid the rustling of silks, the *ric-rac* of fans, the affected little coughs which give time to prepare a reply, the mellifluous little laughs which always accompany feminine affectation, and the perfumes peculiar to many different tastes and to many different toilet-tables. At times one of those sudden silences reigned which the Andalusian people attribute to the involuntary respect inspired by the invisible flight of a passing angel; it was more probably some little devil who was arriving, some lady famous for something, who in crossing the threshold obliged criticism to fall back upon itself, in order to study the point upon which to discharge its volley.

Not a man was in sight; in the lower part of the room, behind the simple red velvet curtain with the Butron coat of arms embroidered in the centre, which concealed the stage of the theatre, one could, however, detect something masculine, some unholy spirit which coughed and sneezed like the rest of mortals, as two coughs and a sneeze had reached the quick ears of the Señora de Barajas, who was seated near-by. She nudged her sister with her elbow, saying in a very low voice, "There are hobgoblins here." And the other, without turning her head, answered very seriously:

"Crusoe and his man Friday, who must have taken cold on the desert island."

It was really so. The great Robinson and Don José Pulido were behind the curtain, taking observations through the two imperceptible little holes which in former times had served to reveal the hall to the illustrious actors who had trodden this aristocratic stage. The worthy diplomat seemed to be uneasy, and Don José Pulido came and went

silently from one little hole to the other, compressing his lips and shaking his head, with signs also of some anxiety.

The assemblage was numerous, select, and well suited to second the plans of the diplomat; but nevertheless an alarming symptom was noticeable, a dangerous want of discipline on the part of the leading aristocracy and born Alfonsists, the majority of whom were grandees of Spain. These had all seated themselves on the left side in a group, and, whispering and exchanging among themselves little laughs and sarcastic signs, watched the parvenu radicals come in and group themselves on the opposite side, with the air of disdainful protection of the great lady who permits her maid to be seated in her presence four metres away. The Duchess of Bara alone, faithful to the countersign of the chief, had hastened to seat herself between the wives of the two retired ministers, — Martinez's wife, a woman most modest and retiring, and who felt here like a fish out of water; and Garcia Gomez's wife, a pretentious upstart, who aspired to be the Duchess's equal, with her ostentation of elegance and good form.

In vain the Marchioness of Butron went from one side to the other, trying with her fine tact and delicate manners to nip in the bud these small feminine antagonisms and these aroused vanities, which threatened to destroy the longed-for fusion so dearly bought at Currita's ball; her painful task only succeeded in placing the Duchess of Astorga, a very kind-hearted woman, by the side of her Excellency Sra. Doña Paulina Gomez de Rebollar de Gonzalez de Hermosilla, whose colossal figure stood out upon a very high, isolated seat between Tyrians and Trojans, silent and pensive, like Sappho meditating suicide from the top of the rock of Leucades.

The Carlists, for their part, few in number but warlike in courage, formed another suspicious little group, having at their head a very tiny old woman, thin and nervous, with extremely bright eyes. It was the Baroness of Bivot, an illustrious Catalan, who twisted about in her seat, brandish-

ing her fan with the belligerent ardor of the veteran eager for combat, who smells powder at a distance. Carmen Tagle christened her on the spot.

"There is Zumalacarregui," she said to her neighbor. "Look at her; she is spoiling for a fight."

Butron, fearing a catastrophe, cursed himself inwardly, and applied his ear instead of his eye to the little hole, to see if he could catch any chance word which would give him the clue to the course of the tempest. He could hear nothing save a tremendous buzzing like a bee-swarm in movement, which upset him and made him nervous.

"How is it there is not one silent, among so many?" he exclaimed suspiciously; and Don José Pulido, without losing his self-possession and with philosophic profundity, replied in a very low voice: —

"I prefer them to be talking, Pepe. To be silent would be unnatural."

And at this moment, as if these amiable creatures wished to prove that to go by contraries was the peculiar trait of the sex, they all suddenly ceased speaking. A profound silence reigned, a prolonged lull of nearly a minute's duration, followed in its turn by a noisy *allegro*, a most sudden *crescendo*, rapid and *vivace*. Something important was happening, and the worthy Butron and the philosophic Pulido, without loss of time, hastened back, much excited, to their respective points of observation. The Countess of Albornoz was entering, with that step of which Virgil speaks, which reveals a queen or a goddess, bending her head with that air of satisfied vanity with which a certain Roman emperor bent his upon passing beneath the triumphal arches, as if fearing to graze his forehead against them. Following her was the Marchioness of Valdivieso, one of those convenient friends, easy to please, whom she always had following in her wake as ladies of honor, who served, according to her own expression, as a background to her elegance.

Leopoldina Pastor pulled her by the skirt as she passed, and tried to make her sit down between herself and Carmen

Tagle. She wanted to teach those radicals something, those "good-for-nothings" gaping away there, giving themselves airs, and dreaming perhaps of the presidency.

"Look at them! — what sights!"

She was waiting for Genoveva to speak, so that she might have an opportunity to say to these *parvenus* four well pronounced little words, which, however, would express but mildly what she felt. She would have preferred discussing the question on horseback, like Attila's Huns. Currita tapped her affectionately on the shoulder with her fan, murmuring, "C'est drôle!"

She saluted with a charming little nod the wide circle of her illustrious friends, and allowed herself to be gently led by the Marchioness of Butron to the opposite side, finally seating herself next to the Duchess of Bara and the two ministers' wives. She squeezed the hand of Martinez's wife, affectionately calling her, "My dear!" and expressed to Garcia Gomez's wife her profound regret for not having been at home the day before, when the latter had called to see her.

"I was much vexed upon seeing your card. I should like so much to have had a little chat with you; for I hope we shall be friends."

Garcia Gomez's wife was overwhelmed with satisfaction before such sudden honor, and glanced about in all directions, as complacent and contented between these two grandees of Spain as the rat of the fable in the Holland cheese. Maria Valdivieso, with unusual self-possession, bit her lips to keep from laughing. The venerable Butron from his post of observation watched all this pantomime, and murmured nervously and jubilantly: —

"Good for Currita! The monkey Jenny is clever, by Jove! If Maria Villasis only does as well we shall triumph!"

Don José Pulido, always a prophet of misfortune, expressed his doubts on the subject; his fine instinct had divined a drawback which Butron had not considered.

"She has already a presidential air about her, Pepe," he said.

"Who?"

"Curra Albornoz, Pepe; I told you it would be so."

And so it really was; the latter was so impressed with a sense of her own superiority that she did not doubt for a moment she would be elected, as it seemed to her that after the ball the presidency must follow, as logically and naturally as day follows night, and had accordingly already given various orders to Uncle Frasquito, grand master of her Micos, and had confided to Maria Valdivieso that same afternoon, on the way, several of the thousand charitable merry-makings which she had in view for the benefit of the wounded soldiers of the North, the most important of them being a famous kermis which would produce millions.

Butron was very much annoyed upon hearing Pulido, and raised his arms as if he wished to seize the stage scenery.

"She already has a presidential air, eh? Well, let her have it, Pulido. She is welcome to it, — a woman without a reputation, without one whit of self-respect. All the clergy would be horrified. What would the Archbishop say when I went to ask his blessing on the work? Maria Villasis is the only one. She alone, Pulido."

A new manifestation of doubt on the part of the Egerian nymph, accompanied by the pet name of his Numa Pompilius, — a formula of the intimate and familiar friendship which united him to this personage.

"I doubt it, Pepe."

"So you also find objections to Maria Villasis?"

"Mountains of them, Pepe."

Butron, very much displeased, turned half-way round, saying, "Mole-hills, rather;" and Don José Pulido, without losing his patience, repeated in a very low voice: —

"I say mountains, because she will not come, Pepe."

"She will not come?"

"She is very susceptible to colds. Remember the last meeting, Pepe."

"But she is coming, man; she is coming. Yesterday she promised Veva, whom I sent there expressly, that she would do so."

And it was as he said. The Marchioness of Butron had been to the Marchioness of Villasis's house the day before, to beg her in the name of all the saints not to fail to be present at the Assembly. The poor lady seemed frightened, and besought her to come with as much earnestness as if her life depended upon it. The Marchioness of Villasis, however, did not show herself to be very propitious, and laughing said: —

"But I never should be missed, my dear; not more so than a dog from church."

"Don't say that, Maria, for even you yourself do not think so," replied the other, in an aggrieved manner.

"Well, listen, Genoveva, I will be frank. If it was an affair of yours — yours exclusively, I would go with my whole heart and soul. But being what it is, if I must say so, I do not like this sweeping within of your husband's, which always puts one in danger of stumbling upon riff-raff; and, candidly, I do not care to run the risk of meeting face to face one Curra Albornoz, for instance, or any of her clique."

"You are right; but what can one do if Madrid is a cesspool?"

"No, it is not a cesspool; for you and I and many others constitute Madrid, and thanks be to God, we are not cesspools. Say rather that in Madrid there is a cesspool, which can be perfectly well avoided by proceeding with one's skirts a trifle drawn aside; but unfortunately it is a cesspool which smells of *eau de Cologne*, and for that reason I see there are few who object to living in it."

"But my house is not in this cesspool, Maria."

"I know it, better than any one, because I know you and love you better than any one else. For that reason I do not refuse to go to your house, but only to the meeting

which your husband will hold in your house. Do you understand what I mean?"

As if she feared the other might think the distinction rather metaphysical, she hastened to explain by adding quickly: —

"But you must not think from this that I also refuse, as one of many, to contribute to the ends of the association. I know very well the object of helping the wounded soldiers is a blind in order to reinforce the army; but it does n't matter. I also will contribute to it, but without disguising it as an act of charity. I do it because I was present when the Prince was born, and I look upon him and love him as if he were my own child; and I do it also because I have been solemnly promised that the first care of the Restoration will be to re-establish Catholic unity; for without this requisite I would do absolutely nothing."

The Marchioness of Villasis stopped speaking a moment, and without the least display of ostentation, but with only the natural simplicity of one who makes an insignificant offer, immediately added: —

"So, when you care to draw on me, you have ten thousand dollars at your disposal. If I could give more I would."

The offer of this generous donation did not dazzle the Marchioness of Butron; she had been much disturbed while her friend was speaking, and now, shaking her head energetically, said: —

"I believe you, for you were born to be rich, and know how to be so. But your name, your name, is worth more than the ten thousand dollars."

And the other, giving her an affectionate little pat with her hand, and mimicking her mournful tone, added in a jesting manner: —

"Well, it is just my name, my name, which I will not give. Tell your husband I say so."

The Marchioness of Butron dropped both her hands dejectedly, and said in a suppressed and almost imperceptible voice: —

"My God! How shall I tell him that?"

And suddenly, letting a quick sob escape her, she covered her face with her handkerchief, and a flood of disconsolate tears gushed from her eyes, revealing a profound depth of bitterness, and a grief until then silent and hidden. The Marchioness of Villasis sat for a moment in a state of suspense, astonished and afflicted, through fear of having caused this deep grief.

"But Genoveva, for Heaven's sake! have I offended you?"

The other shook her head earnestly, trying to say between her sobs: —

"No, no, no. It is because Pepe —"

"Very well, don't tell him anything! Do you want me to go? For I will do so with all my heart. How could I imagine I should cause you such grief?" And as much afflicted as her friend, she pressed one of her hands between both her own, while the Marchioness of Butron, without taking her handkerchief away from her face, as if shame as well as tears was choking her, stammered: —

"Pepe, the poor man, is so violent!"

This last word was like a ray of light to the Marchioness of Villasis, which explained the enigma. She crossed her hands with a gesture of anger, of surprise, of most profound pity, and unbounded compassion. So the report was true and certain, which several times had reached her ears, that the noble Butron, the loyal gentleman, and correct diplomat, frequently maltreated this model wife, this illustrious woman, and helpless old lady, sobbing there before her, hiding her husband's shame in the depths of her heart, immersed in her own unhappiness.

A violent impulse of noble anger arose in her heart, and she would have liked to wrest from the unhappy woman the whole of her secret, not only to be able to assuage her grief, but to avenge it. But the noble old lady, faithful to her dignity of wife, maintained that difficult silence with which heroic souls know how to crown one of the most poignant

griefs on earth, the scorned and useless sacrifice; and the Marchioness of Villasis did not dare question her. The first care of delicacy in consoling grief is to respect it, and nothing wounds so much as curiosity, which is the sacrilege, if we may so call it, of impertinence. A silent flood of tears then burst from her own eyes, the most sublime of all tears, those of charity, which when they cannot help or alleviate, at least comfort those who weep by weeping with them; and only upon assuring her many times that she would go with the greatest pleasure the following day to her house, did she dare to add, with one of those heart-felt impulses which makes friendship seem so holy and beautiful: —

"Do you wish anything else, Genoveva? Can I be of service to you in any other way? Tell me!"

Another scarcely audible moan, which revealed the climax of great sorrows, the want of the last consolation, and the solitude of the soul, then escaped the lips of the old lady:

"Yes! Yes! you can! Don't you see? To be able to weep before some one, and to have some one to weep with me, is a great deal."

And upon taking her leave, now completely calm and consoled, she said to the Marchioness of Villasis with an evident purpose: —

"I warn you that I have only asked you to come to the house to-morrow. For whatever may occur there, no one can hold me responsible, and you may refuse your co-operation without fear."

And she added with a sad smile: —

"If I were in your place I would do the same."

CHAPTER VI

The Marchioness of Villasis had not yet come; it was already half-past three, and Butron was in mortal agony for fear of being fooled a second time by the lady. With

his eye glued to the little hole in the curtain, he disguised his bad humor and his fears, so as not to expose himself to the importunate remarks of Pulido, who meanwhile was observing through the other little hole, and confirming himself more and more in his own opinion; both affording to whosoever might enter from the back of the theatre a spectacle original and curious in the extreme. The two little points of observation were quite low down, in order that they might be hidden on the right side by the border of the scutcheon; and to be able to look through them, one was obliged to stoop in a most uncomfortable position, very similar, not to quote others, to that used by the Ohio savages when deliberating in their councils. Ovid did not state whether the enamoured Pyramus took such a comic attitude or not, when seeking a fissure in the wall through which to contemplate Thisbe; if such, however, was the case, the gallant lover was fortunate in not having been seen by the lady. Suddenly, from the back of the theatre resounded heavy footsteps, which made the boards of the stage creak. Butron turned quickly, waving both his outstretched hands, and importuning the indiscreet person in an angry *sotto voce*, like King Lear to the good Kent: —

"Softly, demon, softly!"

It was Uncle Frasquito, who came in, trampling under foot the countersign permitting no entrance to this retreat; he was in a hurry, and anxious to see what was going on in the feminine Congress. He wore a most elegant cravat, an ornament in which profound observers frequently find reflected the moral character of the individual. Uncle Frasquito's cravat on this occasion was of blue Japanese silk, coquettishly fastened with a scarf-pin containing a single pearl, the emblem of grand master to Currita's Micos. The Countess had charged him to meet her at Butron's house, that she might give him without loss of time her first commissions as President.

The new-comer made mute signs to the diplomat not to be vexed, and Butron, execrating under his breath, returned to

his post of observation, privately charging Don José Pulido to repeat to the servants the rigorous countersign. But the latter, fearful lest the intruder should usurp his post, pretended not to understand, and thus the door was left open to the worst calamity which could befall them. While Uncle Frasquito was in vain trying to find another little hole, and not succeeding, began to slyly make one himself with a pen-knife, a large shadow appeared at the back of the stage, gliding along very softly, with its body bent and limping and its hand extended. It was Diogenes, the cynical Diogenes, who upon seeing the three personages glued to the curtain, their backs turned and stooping in the attitudes above referred to, stopped a moment, a silent laugh escaping him, like the laugh of a jackal or a hyena, which, had Uncle Frasquito seen it, would have made the hairs of his wig stand on end. He crossed his arms, shook his great head up and down, and disappeared stealthily behind the scenes and beneath the stage, like a Nihilist who plunges into the bowels of the earth in order to plot sinister projects.

"Maria Villasis! Maria Villasis!" whispered Butron at this same moment, with an air of triumph, and immediately glued his eye again to the hole, that he might lose no detail of the scene which would follow. The Marchioness had really arrived, her presence causing a general movement of surprise, followed by a prolonged murmur, which dissipated Butron's anxiety, made the Duchess of Bara smile triumphantly, and caused Currita to bite her lips, — the latter at once scenting a rival, the most to be feared because she was the most detested. In the minds of all present flashed at the same time the idea that the Marchioness was the one destined for President, for she impressed them all, for various reasons. The sensible and honorable women saw in her the model type of a great lady of virtue and prestige, gracious and affable, who, firm in her convictions in the midst of a frivolous and corrupt society, silently imposed upon them all the powerful criticism of good example. The

others, more frivolous or less honorable, saw in her nevertheless the woman of talent, the lady of great name and immense riches, who, firm and independent in character, and, without at all relinquishing the just privileges which high rank exacts, knew how to draw the line at everything which violated her conscience or her self-respect, thus constituting what the mediocrities of habit so much admire, who are only capable of copying what pleases their vanity or seduces their instincts. Hers was an original type, genuinely noble, gracious, and honorable.

Some, not knowing — as in fact none knew, except the Marchioness of Butron and the Duchess of Bara — the way in which the committee would be arranged, let this idea of the presidency escape in their mysterious whisperings; and Martinez's wife, with frank, although somewhat provincial ingenuousness, made the following remark, which at any other time would have provoked the biting satire of the Duchess of Bara: —

"The Marchioness of Villasis is every inch a Marchioness!"

Maria Valdivieso, with her customary lack of tact, leaned toward Currita, as if to brush away a thread which spoilt the complicated tie of her bonnet strings, and said to her in a very low voice: —

"Eh! how is this? We did not count upon this neighbor. Are you afraid of her?"

The other drew herself up like a Juno who is told that the most insignificant of Olympus's nymphs is about to be seated in her chariot drawn by peacocks, and answered disdainfully: —

"Afraid of her? She has never even caused me to yawn," which is the most depreciative of all actions.

The Marchioness of Villasis was also making observations. She glanced through the drawing-room and instantly took in the usual heterogeneous Madrid crowd, in which virtue and vice are mingled in friendly intercourse, representing the immortal history of the rotten apple, which communicates its

corruptness and its worms to the good ones, without receiving from the latter either their delicious taste or their healthful fragrance; the wanton and noxious mixture of great names and great shames, spotless fame and scandalous reputations, all dressed in the same brilliant varnish of elegant fashion, mingled together and confounded by the same blind appetite for pleasure, by the same foolish impulses of vanity, and by the same irresistible inclination to shake off *ennui* and distract their minds, — the frightful and constant temptation of the great and rich, which lures them on to all their extravagances, and results in all their misdeeds.

"Heavenly Father!" thought the lady. "What a great work would be that of dissolving this mixture which repulses and poisons, and which by taking from vice all social sanction, would stamp its brow with a sign of infamy, restraining it, if not as yet through the fear of God, at least through shame and human respect; for it familiarizes even the most upright consciences with scandal, and destroys the powerful barrier of horror and wonder, which should separate the good from the scandalous; the former, by tolerating the latter in the beginning, only succeeding by following their example in the end. What great good might not one do, who, prompted by the same spirit of Christian charity with which are founded asylums for orphans, and houses of refuge for girls gone astray, would found a *salon* for honorable women, and decent men, in which without any risk of bad example, youth might find the just, legitimate, and even necessary distractions peculiar to their years, and might obtain without any shameless masquerading, that noble and worthy, as well as gay and happy intercourse which refines and softens men's inclinations, fertilizes and restrains those of women, and foments that mutual intercourse and mutual acquaintanceship from which arise chaste sympathies and the germs of pure and holy love, the latter serving as a solid basis to happy and well weighed marriages, and Christian and exemplary families! And charity, that charity derived from heaven, alone holy and legitimate, which sees every-

thing with its quick-sighted eyes, embraces everything with its insatiable activity, and guards against everything with its loving perspicacity, leaving no grief unassuaged, no trouble uncomforted or wound unhealed, — has it never directed its attention to this gangrenous ulcer? Can it be that the poor peasant girl and the unfortunate servant girl, whom abandonment precipitates into the mire of cellars, and whom charity shelters in a house of refuge, are more worthy of pity than the well-born young lady and rich heiress, whom an abandonment different only in form, precipitates in the same manner into the mire of drawing-rooms? And to think that, after all, the cure is not so difficult as it would at first seem, and that it would be perhaps sufficient if one woman of prestige and energy, shutting her eyes to conventional human respect and culpable social condescension, would inaugurate for the love of God a drawing-room of refuge, casting to the four winds of high Madrid society, for all invitation, this stupendous announcement: 'The Marchioness So-and-So, or the Duchess So-and-So, At Home every evening to honorable women and decent men!'"

And when something very deep, but very clear and distinct whispered to the Marchioness of Villasis, in the depths of her conscience, that she might be, and even should be, this Marchioness So-and-So, or that Duchess So-and-So, she was interrupted in the midst of her strange reflections by the voice of Genoveva Butron, who, considering the feminine congress to be now convened, began to expound the object of the meeting.

The Marchioness in her speech adhered strictly to the plan traced out beforehand by Butron, avoiding with consummate cleverness the rough points, and the tremendous lies inserted by the diplomat. She spoke very gently, with simplicity exempt from all pedantry, and with the tact and self-possession which continual intercourse with people, and the consciousness of their own nobility give to persons born and bred in high life. Butron, stooping before his small point of observation, listened with his heart in his mouth to

his wife's discourse, extending his hands and beating time, like the director of an orchestra conducting an operatic score, or a magnetizer emitting from himself with strange passes of his hands a mysterious fluid. He seemed to be thoroughly well satisfied. The misery of the unfortunate soldiers, wounded in the northern campaign, was great and painful, and should justly awaken in the hearts of all Spanish women the most compassionate sentiments. For this reason she, the Marchioness of Butron, had taken the liberty of calling together those present, to beg of them for the love of God and compassion towards these unfortunates, to unite their efforts in their behalf, by forming an association of ladies, which, propagated through all the provinces, could thus gather together numerous resources for this object.

The first part of the Marchioness's discourse was reduced to this, and was listened to in a religious silence. There was a pause, in which the different factions looked from one to the other, all silently on the alert, with the solemn expectation of opposed armies, who await, before showing fight, the sound of the first discharge. The Baroness of Bivot, the valiant Zumalacarregui, broke fire first, with an excellent shot of the most accurate logic.

"The idea could not be more charitable nor more holy, and I suppose it merits the approbation of all these ladies as it merits mine," she said, fanning herself slowly. "But it must be remembered that in this northern campaign there are two Spanish armies" — and the wicked old lady accented the Spanish, with an ambiguous little laugh, which made Butron jump behind the curtain — "the government army and the Carlist army. In both there are wounded soldiers, and in both there is misery. I suppose, therefore, that these resources which will be gathered together will be divided into two equal parts; one for the wounded soldiers of the government, and the other for the Carlists."

A sepulchral silence prevailed throughout the room. Butron giving nervous starts, fumed, beside himself, in his hiding-place.

"The devil take the old woman! What an idea! Of course this was my plan, — for the Carlists to buy firearms with the funds of my association! And the stupid Veva is silent! Answer, Geno, idiot! Answer no; let her go if she likes, but not one cent will she get from here. I will denounce her first!"

The Marchioness, much perturbed, did not answer, in fact, for this logical observation, so well timed and unexpected, really had no answer. The Marchioness of Villasis, pitying the confusion of her friend, instantly hastened to her assistance.

"The Baroness is quite right," she said; "but nevertheless, she has not considered an insuperable objection. The government will doubtless permit all kinds of help to be distributed in the army; but it could not possibly tolerate the passage of any money whatsoever for the Carlists. For this reason the association must content itself with aiding the wounded soldiers of the army, leaving those who wish secretly to go to the aid of the Carlists." And turning towards the Baroness she added with a significant smile: —

"I suppose, Baroness, you know very well the way to do so, but if there should be any who do not know, I can show them a very sure medium through which to send help to these unfortunate soldiers, who are no less in need and no less worthy. I already have my own plan drawn out; the half of what I can give will go to Genoveva, and the other half I shall send, through this medium of which I speak, to the Carlists."

What a face Butron made! At the Marchioness's first words, he breathed heavily, murmuring, "The amendment is not bad." But when he saw, by the turn which the lady gave to her answer, and by the plan which she expounded, that it was not a stratagem which she made use of, but a real project that others could imitate, he lost all patience, and quite beside himself growled between his pointed whiskers:

"The devil! the devil! the devil! The cure is worse than the malady; everything will be ruined by this; they will rob us of half the funds — will ruin us."

Pulido, with his phlegmatic suaveness, then said to him:

"Don't worry, Pepe. Few will give if they must do so in secret."

The valiant Zumalacarregui, stopped short by the no less logical reply of the Marchioness, hung fire, and took refuge on the Aventine Mount with a retreat worthy of Jenofonte.

The Marchioness of Butron took advantage of this favorable opportunity to resume the most difficult part of her discourse. It would be necessary to appoint a directive Committee, and for this object she would read out a candidature made by the advice of authorized persons, to be submitted to the approbation of all present.

It was a daring stroke, and the imposition was quite manifest; for it was natural to suppose that no one would dare to oppose a plan proposed by such an estimable lady in her own house. The silence was profound, and one might almost have heard the nervous blinking of Butron's and Pulido's eyelids glued to the curtain, the audible breathing which it cost Uncle Frasquito to maintain himself steadily in his uncomfortable position, or the symptoms of laughter in Diogenes, who, concealed in the prompter's box in front of the curtain, with his back to the audience, was listening first to one, then to the other, and was doubtless concocting some diabolical plan which made him laugh to himself. The Marchioness drew out a large sheet of paper and began to read in a somewhat strained voice: —

"President: her Excellency the Marchioness of Villasis."

General murmur of approbation. A brusque movement from Currita, and a sudden flash of anger and concentrated rage, ready to overflow in her light eyes. Behind the curtain, Butron smiled contentedly, and Pulido gave a sigh of relief. Uncle Frasquito, surprised and indignant upon seeing his queen dethroned, lost his equilibrium and grasped the curtain, almost upsetting his companions, who with mute gestures and furious looks called him to order. In the prompter's box Diogenes made a face as much as to say, "You are all very fresh," and continued laughing to himself.

The Marchioness of Butron continued: —

"Vice-President: her Excellency the Countess of Albornoz."

A profound silence. Two hundred scrutinizing eyes were fixed upon the one mentioned, and Izabel Mazacan waved to her from a distance an ironical little salute of congratulation. Currita bit her lips, and bloody circles appeared around the pupils of her eyes. A bit of lace from her handkerchief slipped from her lap to the floor. Behind the curtain Butron was again alarmed, Pulido murmured, "I told you so," and Uncle Frasquito resisted the impulse to cover his face with his hands, for fear of again losing his equilibrium. Diogenes had disappeared from the box.

The Marchioness of Butron continued: —

"Members : Her Excellency the Duchess of Astorga and her Excellency the Countess of Villarcayo."

A movement of horror in Zumalacarregui's army. A gesture of protest from the chief. The favored one smiles idiotically, which reveals the reason why she figures in the list.

The Marchioness of Butron continued: —

"Her Excellency the Marchioness of Minahonda, and her Excellency Sra. Doña Servanda Molinillos de Martinez."

A modest blush on the face of the latter, who extends her hands with a gesture of protest and shakes her head negatively. The Duchess of Bara encourages her affectionately. Garcia Gomez's wife restrains her indignation until certain whether or not she is to be included in the list. Behind the curtain Butron looks at Pulido, and Pulido looks at Butron, and both laugh. Uncle Frasquito, standing on his dignity, remains in his stooping position. Diogenes appears on the stage and gropes about for something near the wall, between the scenes on the left side.

The Marchioness of Butron continued: —

"Her Excellency the Countess of Macharnudo and her Excellency the Duchess of Bara."

A secret feeling of surprise on the latter's part, upon see-

ing herself included in the group in which, by Butron's exactions, only honorable women were to figure.

The Marchioness paused, examined the auditorium a moment, and continued reading: —

"Secretary: her Excellency Sra. Doña Paulina Gomez de Rebollar de Gonzalez de Hermosilla."

A violent start from Leopoldina Pastor, who expected the post, and an energetic "Good-for-nothing!" which revolved anonymously in the air without knowing upon whom to alight. Carmen Tagle laughed immoderately. The chosen one maintained a majestic silence, adjusted her gold-rimmed spectacles, and planned to instil the rhetoric of Marcus Tullius into her official documents. The Duchess of Astorga congratulated her without a bit of malice. Back of the curtain Butron waited, Pulido feared, and Uncle Frasquito meditated. Diogenes discovered next to the wall a little cord, which seemed to hang from the roof, and examined it attentively.

The Marchioness of Butron concluded:

"Treasurer: her Excellency Sra. Doña Ramona Gomez de Lopez Moreno."

Symptoms of apoplexy in the interested party. Her joint mother-in-law, the Duchess of Bara, saluted her from a distance. Great whisperings are now heard, which grow and swell in volume like blasts of wind from a hurricane, which, whistling at first, end in a growl. Suddenly there was a mysterious creaking; then a profound silence, and general surprise.

Diogenes had pulled the little cord, the curtain flew up rapidly and disclosed to the astonished eyes of these hundreds of Thisbes the three stooping Pyramuses: Butron, Pulido, and Uncle Frasquito! Tableau!

CHAPTER VII

The association of women was a complete fiasco, and only after an interval of two months, and at the cost of much labor, could Butron organize another, on a very different basis, which did not fail to reap, especially in the provinces, a most abundant harvest. The Marchioness of Villasis had roundly refused to accept the presidency; Currita rejected the humiliating offer of a secondary post, with signs of great resentment; the Carlists, very indignant, withdrew to one side, and the radicals, much offended, to the other, leaving unfinished the epic poem to charity, which her Excellency Sra. Doña Paulina Gomez de Rebollar de Gonzalez de Hermosilla was perpetrating in silence; and empty was the large Pompadour purse of red velvet which Lopez Moreno's wife was about to order from the modiste, in which to collect the donations.

Don José Pulido unfolded the three little joints of his index finger, and shook it up and down as if to say, "I told you so;" and the judicious diplomat, with the energy of constancy which consists, not in always acting in the same manner, but in always having the same end in view, employed other means to attain his object and consoled himself with the reflection that Napoleon had also made mistakes in the Russian war, Cyrus in the war of the Scythians, Cæsar in Africa, and Alexander in India. The following day an indignation meeting was held at the Countess of Albornoz's house, and the proud lady adopted for herself Marat's reply to Camille Desmoulins and Freron, when the two latter proposed to him that they incorporate their respective newspapers *La Tribune des Patriotes* and *L'Ami du Peuple:* "The eagle always soars alone, geese go in flocks." She was the eagle, the rest of the ladies were the geese. Butron was their tender.

The sensitive Countess deeply sympathized, however, with the fate of these unfortunate wounded soldiers of the North; and she resolved to do, single-handed and at her own expense, all that she could to alleviate them, by communicating directly with the general-in-chief of the army, and with the gallant General Pastor, Leopoldina's brother. She called together her *Micos*, assembled her intimate friends, and mapped out an enchanting programme of festivals, balls, and merry-makings, all for the benefit of the wounded soldiers; among which the one to carry off the palm would be a famous kermis, originated by Currita in imitation of the one organized in Paris by *The Figaro* at the Opera House, for the benefit of the inundated inhabitants of Szegedin. The most famous actresses and the most conspicuous women of fashion, all levelled by the same compassionate sentiments, had done wonders in it, by sacrificing in behalf of these distressed people the more or less fancy values of their respective shames. In barely two hours Mme. Judic had collected more than five thousand francs by selling *marrons glacés*. What could not Currita collect by selling for even half an hour, were it only peanuts or roasted chick-peas?

Jacob's permission to the project was lacking, however, and without this requisite the lady did not dare take any steps in anything in which money would be required; but strange to say, Jacob did not put in an appearance at her house during the entire evening, nor did he come to breakfast the following day as usual. Currita alarmed, sent a message to the house of her absent friend, to find out the cause of his strange eclipse; his valet's reply was most decisive: —

"The Marquis of Sabadell had left Madrid the night before."

Currita was dumfounded. Jacob gone, and without saying a word to her, without even sending her a message, if only four words? What a stab to her heart, and above all what a blow to her self-love! For what would people say

when they began to realize the disregard and indifference which this proved?

This scene occurred in the dining-room, where husband and wife were breakfasting in company with Maria Valdivieso, Celestino Reguera, and Gorito Sardona, whose new blue cravat proved him to be on this occasion the *Mico* of honor. They all looked at Currita very much surprised and with a questioning air, upon learning of Jacob's departure, and Villamelon, suspending for a moment the feverish activity with which he was wielding his carving knife of massive gold, gift of Ferdinand VII., said in a doleful voice: —

"Jacob is in a bad way, and it grieves me very much."

And as if the sorrow which his friend's misfortunes caused him served to aid his digestive organs, he swallowed at once a whole cutlet, which melted in his mouth from pure lusciousness, like a *meringue*.

"But, my dear Fernandito," replied Maria Valdivieso, "I do not think Jacob suffers from any complaint. He is stout and robust; Paco Velez told me so yesterday, and he is developing a double chin like any ultramarine merchant."

"But it is not that, Maria, you know," said Villamelon, with his mouth full. "I say he is in a bad way because he is going to the bad. Do you understand me?"

Everybody was silent, their heads bent upon their plates, and all glancing out of the corner of their eyes at Currita, who, having lost her appetite no doubt, was peeling with the utmost nicety and care a splendid apricot. Villamelon, who always struggled at the table between his desire to speak and his desire to eat, continued with some impatience: —

"The little French girl — the — the — What is her name? What a nuisance! I lose my memory for days at a time! You know, Gorito! What is her name, man, — the lady of the camellias?"

Gorito opened his eyes very wide and stretched his mouth without having the faintest recollection of anything. His memory had suddenly become as blank as a sheet of white paper. Maria Valdivieso winked rapidly at Currita, as if to

let her know she could give her some important information, and Villamelon concluded more and more impatiently: —

"Well, it does n't matter; I don't remember. But it is she, in fine, who is plucking him of his feathers."

The silence became still more embarrassing, and the malicious little spirit of hilarity began to flutter about the guests, as if it had dawned upon them all that the feathers wrested from Jacob were plucked from Villamelon's skin. Currita, still peeling her apricot, took advantage of a moment in which the servants were not present to say in a half-whisper, and with her softest accent: —

"Fernandito, my love, you assuredly have the gift of making ill-timed remarks; you are like a watch out of order. Who would have thought of speaking of such things before the servants? Heaven knows what they will think of poor Jacob."

Villamelon with much dignity immediately replied: —

"Listen, Curra. I never discuss at the table, you know. You have a partiality for Jacob, but you are going to be sadly disappointed in him. Do you understand me? This sudden little journey makes a bad impression upon me; I can wager he does not go alone."

Currita put the apricot now already peeled in her plate, washed the tips of her fingers in the finger-bowl of rich Venetian glass which she had before her, and looking at the tiny drops of water which trickled from her rosy little nails, said ingenuously: —

"Of course not! He will doubtless take one of his valets."

Villamelon nearly choked, and looked at his wife, then at Gorito, and lastly at Reguera with a certain air of choleric complacency written in his face, which was convulsed and apoplectic from the vapors of his full stomach. He was exasperated at times by this simplicity of Curra's, who could never understand the malice of certain things!

The breakfast was over at last, and Currita left the dining-room, her arm locked in her cousin's, carrying in her hand a

small china plate filled with bread-crumbs for the little gold-fish which, in a magnificent crystal and gilded bronze aquarium, adorned one of the corridors. She was in love with these little gayly colored fish, and of all sporting pleasures fishing caused her the most satisfaction.

"Regalaréte entonces
Mil varios pecicillos
Que al verte, simplecillos
De ti se harán prender."

"I will make you a present
Of a thousand little fish
Who, when they see you, the simpletons,
Will make you love them."

Maria Valdivieso listened stupefied to these idyllic expansions, because she had expected that Currita would question her with the same fury and the same transports with which Othello had questioned Iago. The disappointment was too much for her, and she exclaimed very indignantly: —

"These are some of the outbursts which fishing inspires! I cannot find a more exact definition for the sport than that which describes the fishing-rod as 'a long pole which terminates at one end with a fish, and at the other with a fool.'"

"All a question of taste," replied Currita. And she began to throw her crumbs to the fish, speaking to them with the affection and indulgence of a mother caressing her little ones.

"Be still, little gluttons! What an appetite! Gently! Eat in peace, there is enough for all. Look, look, Maria, how they open their little mouths. How delicious! How cunning!"

"This woman is as cold-blooded as an eel," thought the Marchioness of Valdivieso, very much vexed. "Very well! Just wait; I will arouse you yet!"

And she began to tell her, in confirmation of Villamelon's thesis, perfect horrors of Jacob. Paco Velez had told her everything the night before. She, of course, from prudence, had for some time held her peace, but it was time now to

speak; and as a true friend it was her duty to enlighten her.

"Naughty! Glutton!" said Currita at that moment. "Don't bite! Did you see that? For whom are those bubbles! For you? Are those little bubbles for me?" And straightening herself up a little she said, still looking at the aquarium: —

"I beg pardon, my dear! where did you say that French girl lives?"

"I did n't say anything about it," cried the other, her indignation changing to fury; "but I will tell you now, so you will open your eyes. She lives in Calle Rebollo, No. 68, in her own house. Do you understand? — in an extremely pretty hotel, and her name is — what is her name? Well, I don't remember, but it was a name like some pill."

"Stories, my dear, all stories of idle people," replied Currita, tranquilly handling her crumbs. And with feverish anxiety she reviewed in her mind the names of all the pills known, and made violent efforts to engrave upon her memory Calle Rebollo and No. 68.

"Stories!" exclaimed the Marchioness of Valdivieso, beside herself. "And is the journey also a story? With the accompanying valet, of course!"

"Of course it is!" suddenly exclaimed Currita, angrily flinging all the crumbs into the aquarium. "It is a story, and a story of malicious intent, Maria! As if I did n't know! And as if other people are not always better acquainted with one's private affairs than one's self. You are my friend, and I tell you in confidence that Jacob has gone away on business for the party, and will return very soon. So now you see how things are distorted."

"Ah!" exclaimed Maria Valdivieso, swallowing the lie; and Currita at last breathed somewhat more freely, for this story, which her cousin would hasten to propagate throughout Madrid, by reason of its having been told her in confidence, would conceal from the eyes of the world the wound to her self-love. At three o'clock the Countess ordered her vic-

toria, and, as if the most natural thing in the world, gave the coachman Jacob's address. The latter lived in Calle Alcala, in delightful bachelor's quarters, his household consisting of a valet, a jockey, a housekeeper, and a cook. In the stable, located at one end of Calle del Barquillo, he had four English horses, three driving horses, and one saddle horse, a landau, a *char-à-bancs*, and a victoria. The munificence of the Villamelons defrayed all these expenses, which the faithful friend would repay once the Restoration was established, when he would reap the benefit of the ministerial portfolio, the future price of his mysterious papers.

Currita went lightly up the steps to the vestibule of Jacob's dwelling, and rang the bell three times before any one answered her. The door was at last opened by the jockey, who, without uniform, collar, or cravat, his eyes glistening, his mouth working, and a strong odor of wine about him, seemed dazed at finding himself face to face with the lady; he took a step backwards, saying confusedly: —

"The Marquis is away."

"I know it. I want to see Damian."

It was not necessary to call him; at the end of the passage-way his head could be distinguished, and behind him the housekeeper and the cook, all red and flustered, as if the visit had surprised them in the midst of a sumptuous banquet. Damian came forward very serenely, exchanging with the perturbed jockey a malicious wink, a sly, roguish act, which the Countess distinctly saw, and which, in spite of her shamelessness, made the little bit of great lady still left in her rise in rebellion.

"Come in, your Ladyship," he said; and he hurriedly threw open the two drawing-room doors, raising the velvet curtain to allow the lady to pass. The latter crossed the room rapidly, opened for herself the door of a small adjoining room, and did not stop until she had reached Jacob's private study, as if she was quite at home there. Seating herself in an arm-chair she said: —

"How is this, Damian? What has been the cause of this

sudden departure? I was only able to see the Marquis a moment, and that, when people were present."

"I really don't know," replied Damian, shrugging his shoulders. "The Marquis arose yesterday at one o'clock in the afternoon, and went out without his breakfast. He returned about six o'clock and ordered his trunks to be packed."

"Did he take much baggage? He told me he expected to be gone several days."

"Yes, my Lady! he took a trunk and two valises. I packed them myself."

"Did he go alone, then, after all? He told me he might perhaps have to accompany some French ladies."

Damian seemed to be very much taken aback, and again shrugged his shoulders.

"Demetrio accompanied him to the station. I remained at home."

"Call Demetrio; I am interested in knowing."

Demetrio appeared, half drunk, and turned to look at Damian, trying to hide a smile. He had not seen anything, in the midst of so much confusion, but in the Marquis's car there was other baggage.

"Did he go in a sleeping-car?"

"No; it was a private car."

Currita bit her lips.

"Did he leave his address here?"

"No, madam."

"I asked, so you might forward his mail to him. He left his address with me."

"If your Ladyship wishes, I can bring you any letters that come for him, if you care to forward them."

"Yes, that is the best and quickest," said Currita, hastily. At this moment a most vehement desire took possession of her to go through the house. It was very pretty and everything was very well arranged, — the drawing-room, the two little adjoining rooms, the study, the bedroom, bathroom, and dressing-room. In the latter a picture attracted her

attention. It represented a bunch of camellias, from the centre of which arose the bust of a blond woman, luxuriously reclining upon this bed of flowers so artistically arranged. There was no doubt of it; it was the anonymous French girl, the one with the name like the pill which was so cruelly strangling her. She stopped a moment to look at it with an air of intelligence.

"A pretty idea! The pose is correct. Who is it?"

Damian again shrugged his shoulders.

"She is a French woman who paints these things, the daughter of a general. His Lordship bought the picture some time ago."

"Ah! yes. Now I know who it is: she lives in Calle Rebollo, No. 68. What is her name?"

"Her name? I really don't remember, but it is a queer one, like the name of an elixir."

Currita controlled a movement of impatience, because things were beginning to get more and more complicated. One said the name was like a pill and the other like an elixir, but she only knew positively that it had something to do with an apothecary shop. On going through the dining-room, the housekeeper advanced to meet her, very attentive and obsequious, making her robust person as big as possible in order to hide from the Countess the sight of the table, upon which were the remains of the feast in which these worthies had been indulging in the absence of their master.

The cook, a downright rascal, hastened forward from the other end of the room, with a good-natured and patronizing air, and invited her also to see his kitchen; Currita flushed crimson, but dared not refuse. Clenching her fists with rage and indignation, the lady got into her carriage and ordered the coachman to drive to General Belluga's house. That sly little laugh of the jockey's, and that unlikely confusion which prevented him from seeing whether his master accompanied any ladies or not, made a very bad impression upon her, and she resolved to find out the truth for herself.

The general's carriage was at the door, the footman reclining against the door-post, and the coachman, with his flaring cockade, stiff upon the box-seat. On the stairs, ready to go out, the Countess met the general's wife and her daughters, two buds recently graduated from York College in England, who were beginning to lose, in the vitiated atmosphere of drawing-rooms, the natural perfume of their innocence and purity, as rosemary and thyme, shut up in a musk-box, lose their healthy fragrance. The Countess called them her little goddaughters, for at her famous ball given on a broad basis, they had been presented to the world for the first time under her auspices.

The ladies offered to turn back, and Currita, without opposing the polite suggestion, readily consented. Ah! she was playing the rôle of Cain, as she had come for nothing less than to rob her friend for a whole afternoon of one of her goddaughters. She and the other ladies were overworked, begging contributions for the poor wounded soldiers, and objects of all sorts for the raffle or kermis, which promised to be a great success. She had been left to herself that afternoon, and so had come to find an agreeable companion and guardian angel, who would help her collect the things. What compassionate heart could resist such a supplicant! And she kissed Margarita, the elder of the two sisters, upon the cheek, who, fixing upon her her large eyes of heavenly blue, smiled as an innocent child might smile at the various plays of light reflected on the brilliant scales of a serpent. The general's wife immediately gave her consent, feeling highly honored; and this exemplary lady, this affectionate and Christian mother, who had brought up her children in the holy fear of God, and in the fold of purity, intrusted, without any misgivings whatsoever, the most beautiful of her daughters to this notorious character and outrageous impostor. They all left the house together, the Countess of Albornoz leading the way, leaning upon Margarita's arm; half-way down the steps she turned vivaciously and said: —

"As we shall be late getting through, I shall take my goddaughter home to dine with me, if I may?"

"Certainly, Countess, whatever you like."

"Thanks, my dear, thanks!"

In one of the pockets of the carriage, Currita had a slip of paper upon which was jotted down a great number of names and addresses. They made two visits, one upon the wife of a magistrate of the Supreme Court, and the other upon the wife of a brigadier artillery officer, both most estimable ladies, from whom having obtained all she could, the Olympic Countess began to ridicule them with shameful facetiousness, causing the innocent Margarita to be convulsed with laughter. She then gave the coachman another address, which was jotted down in lead pencil in her own handwriting, and was the last on the list.

"Calle de Rebollo, No. 68."

"Who lives there?" asked Margarita.

"I really don't know; some French girl who paints. If we can only get some little picture out of her."

"Do you know this is great fun?"

"I should think so indeed! To see the comic faces of these poor people when they are besieged with an appeal to charity! Their purses; how ridiculous! They surrender their purses, but are none the less ridiculous for so doing."

"Will you take me with you another afternoon, Countess?"

"Certainly my dear, with the greatest pleasure: but don't call me Countess, call me Curra; after all, I am not so old!"

They reached Calle Rebollo, No. 68, and the carriage stopped before the house which looked like a bon-bon box, more pretentious than artistic, pretty rather than luxurious. Currita got out first, very nervous and somewhat pale, not from shame or fright, but from anger, anxiety, and indignation. At last she was about to enter the wild beast's den, clinging to the mantle of charity; ostensibly in behalf of

the wounded soldiers of the North, but in reality to investigate for herself whether or not the baggage which Demetrio had seen in the private car belonged to this drug, be she pill or elixir. For this, and this only, had the impostor undertaken this charitable round, selecting for her companion an innocent girl, incapable of sounding the marshy ground she was treading. A very smart groom was at the door, the one Currita had seen at the Royal theatre, the night of the initial performance of *Dinorah*. She asked him if the ladies were at home, and the boy answered in the affirmative, showing them into a small drawing-room on the ground-floor. Currita thought to herself: —

"Doubtless she is away, and I shall meet the old woman face to face."

A microscopic and hideous little dog struggled out from some blankets by the fireside and began to bark, slinking back again immediately afterwards, growling and shivering. Margarita was afraid of the wretched little animal.

"It looks like an ugly little fiend," she said.

The room was half dark, the furniture dirty and tumbled, and over some of the chairs were thrown articles of clothing. Upon an inlaid table of very pretty workmanship, among various pieces of bric-à-brac and a photograph album, was a large copper chocolate pitcher, old and scorched, the thick liquid dripping from its hard wooden spout. The Countess pointed out to Margarita with the tip of her parasol the strange ornament, saying in a low voice: —

"An artist's caprice."

Margarita laughed, scarcely being able to control herself, and the Countess, notwithstanding her preoccupation, was forced to join her, adding in a half-whisper: —

"If she does n't send us this utensil for the kermis — "

She was interrupted by an opening door which resounded in the interior, then another opened still nearer, and the groom raised the curtain. Currita breathed more freely. The fairy lady, the incognita of the camellias, came in with the ease and assurance of a *café chantant* diva, who presents

herself before the public with a look more of provocation than of fear or timidity. The Countess was also perfectly self-possessed; with the exquisite distinction of the great lady, which she possessed to such a considerable extent, and with the tact of the woman of the world, which finds redress for all exigencies, exits from all labyrinths, and words for all situations, she unfolded to the anonymous lady the object of her visit. The latter, much moved and in very bad Spanish, replied that she loved Spain very much, and that the Carlists, especially Diego Corrientes, and José Maria were very daring brigands.

Currita, upon hearing her broken Spanish, addressed her in French, and she thanked her for the attention with a charming smile. She now began to speak with great fluency and elegance, lamenting the ravages of war, praising woman's mission, and dwelling upon the virtue of charity, with the fire and enthusiasm of Vincent de Paul in person. Currita said to her, smiling: —

"I see I have not been mistaken in appealing to your sentiments, and hope you will send us some help for our poor wounded ones."

"Ah! yes, I should be delighted!"

"Anything you like; some ornament for the kermis."

"I will send, then, some object of art."

Margarita bit her lips to keep from laughing, wondering if the chocolate pitcher would be the promised object of art. Currita then said to her with a gracious smile: —

"And if this object of art should be the work of your own genius, it would be much more acceptable."

"Of my own genius?" the other repeated, much surprised.

"Yes, of your genius; you must know these things cannot be hidden. Your countrywoman Mme. de Staël has said, 'Genius shines wheresoever it may be.'"

"Ah!"

"The Marquis of Sabadell," continued Currita, letting the words fall slowly, "showed me that little bunch of camellias

which you sold him some time ago. It is a delicious picture! If you send to the kermis a similar one there will be no gift to equal it."

The anonymous lady continued smiling, with her eyes cast down, as if overwhelmed by the weight of these praises, which made the nostrils of her delicate nose dilate with rage. Currita wished to give her a parting thrust, and with an air of bountiful protection then said to her: —

"Have you many scholars?"

The other drew herself up suddenly, as if the idea of working for her living offended her too much.

"The Marquis told me you gave lessons in painting."

"Oh! no, no, I am no professor, only a poor pupil." And with her soft accent and modest gestures, she concealed and controlled the impulse which makes an angry cat try to scratch the eyes out of its adversary. Currita was at last satisfied, and took her departure, leaving the fairy lady apparently overwhelmed and humiliated. The carriage once in motion, Margarita burst into a laugh, exclaiming in the midst of her innocent mirth: —

"But what was the chocolate pitcher doing in the parlor?"

"Have I not already told you?" replied Currita, joining in the girl's mirth. "Not a doubt but she will send it to the kermis as a unique ornament; you will see I am not mistaken."

Three days later Margarita was convinced that her illustrious friend and godmother was completely mistaken. Pedro Lopez had said, and thousands of readers had read in the *Fleur-de-lis*, that the Angel of Charity had taken up his abode in the palace of the celestial Countess of Albornoz. Be this as it may, it was none the less true that, from the four corners of the town and Court, beautiful presents were sent to the palace for the kermis patronized by the Countess, which, arranged with great care in the various drawing-rooms, were exhibited to the public. Every night, in one of the splendidly lighted rooms, around a large table covered with

rich, dark-colored tapestry, were grouped a smiling throng of young maids and elegant youths, — as Pedro Lopez called them, — who were mixed together in pairs, all closer than ordinary circumstances required, and seemingly engrossed in the charitable task of making bandages for the unfortunate wounded soldiers of the North.

Currita, wishing to awaken emulation in behalf of the poor soldiers, distributed her guests in this manner, and it was truly an affecting sight, which brought tears to the eyes, to see these tender couples of innocent little maidens of fifteen or twenty years of age, and modest little men of twenty, thirty, and even forty years of age, drawing threads from the same little piece of linen, sustaining meanwhile in undertones charitable discourses, which encouraged them in the holy work, all being of course under the inspection of the angelical Countess of Albornoz, who went from side to side distributing the couples, giving out materials, and collecting upon silver waiters, aided by her *Micos,* the work already finished. She encouraged the indolent ones with a smile, inflamed the lukewarm ones with a word, and imparted in all directions the fire of charity with which she herself was consumed. Neither St. Francis's staff, nor St. Theresa's mantle, nor the girdle of St. Ignatius of Loyola, had ever effected cures as miraculous as those which would be wrought by these threads, drawn with such pure intentions, upon the wounds, sores, and bruises of the poor soldiers. It was a sight worth seeing, and Diogenes, who saw it once, told in the Veloz Club, late one night, what he thought of the working couples, and of what their directress and teacher reminded him.

The most prominent personages in Madrid went there to pay their tribute, and even Don Casimiro Pantojas had drawn out his threads one night, without more than one mishap, born of his shortness of sight; he mistook for his piece of linen the fine batiste handkerchief of the lady by his side, which was lying forgotten on the table, and began eagerly pulling the threads out, making two very fine balls

of lint. The lady screamed, for the handkerchief recalled for her many reminiscences, and Don Casimiro, disconsolate upon perceiving his error, returned it to her with a fringe around it two inches wide.

Two figures of the first magnitude, the Marquis of Butron and Uncle Frasquito, had, however, made themselves conspicuous by their absence. It was thought that an obstinate cold held the latter a prisoner between the four walls of his house, and it was no secret that the relations of the great Robinson with the illustrious lady had become somewhat strained since the offer and rejection of the vice-presidency. Great surprise was then caused by the appearance, on this particular evening, of the hairy diplomat in the charitable workshop. He approached the Countess with his most smiling face and most expressive gestures, while she, upon seeing him, allowed a slight exclamation of infantile delight to escape her, and increased the astonishment of all present by calling to him in her most coaxing voice: —

"Butron! Have you come to help? You know we don't allow any idlers here. Come, pull out your threads with me from my piece of linen."

And abandoning to its own impulses the philanthropic task of enkindling the fervor of her co-workers, she withdrew to a corner with the diplomat, carrying in her hand a fine square piece of linen and a silver salver upon which to collect the lint. Currita as yet had learned nothing of Jacob, and upon seeing the wise Mentor come in, imagined he would give her news of the fugitive Telemachus. Butron, however, was as much in the dark as herself, and the same thought and the same interested motives had brought him in search of the invulnerable Calypso. Jacob's sudden departure had alarmed him, as he feared some plot in connection with it which would be prejudicial to his political interests, and pretending to know what he wished to know, he had made up his mind skilfully to draw from the lady the clew to the mystery.

Currita and Butron looked at each other for a moment in

their secluded little corner, as if mutually inviting each other to speak, and she, seeing that the worthy diplomat gave her no information whatsoever, began most earnestly to pull out her threads, and to confide to him her domestic troubles. Fernandito was in a very bad way, and his health was a source of great concern to her: his failing memory had even reached the point of making him forget, some days ago, that he had dined, and he kicked up a terrible row, to go back for the second time to the table. Doctor Sanchez Ocana and Dr. Letamendi had examined him, and had both agreed that this was the beginning of an attack of softening of the brain, which would gradually lead him to the tomb. She was sorely oppressed. If it was only some sudden illness, which it should please God would take him in a few days! Of course it was always sad for a woman to be left alone, with children to educate and no man by her side. But to see him suffer such a long time, gradually and hopelessly wasting away! "And every day more idiotic, Butron! I assure you I do not exaggerate. I thought it was impossible for him to become more so, but he progresses daily."

The worthy Butron sighed, and baiting with a bit of consolation his fishing-rod, he delicately extended it.

"You will always have your excellent friend Jacob to advise you. Has he not written you?"

She, arranging with much care her little pile of lint, answered simply: —

"Yes, I had a letter yesterday. Of course you have heard from him too?"

"No, I have n't had a line, but I am not surprised. Upon taking leave of me he said he would not write until he had definite news. What address does he give?"

The threads became tangled and she was compelled to lean towards the light to pull them straight, pausing meanwhile.

"Would you believe it, he does n't give any! He says, however, he is writing in the restaurant of the depot, while

waiting for the up-going train. He is so considerate, the poor fellow! and wished to relieve my mind at all costs."

"Yes, he is very considerate, but also very heedless. So he gives you no address whatsoever?"

"No, none."

"Well, you see, he has left none with me either, and it is most necessary I should send him certain instructions which have been received since his departure. I came to-night for that very reason, to ask if you know where he is."

"Well, I must say I do not, Butron, and I am very much perplexed about it, for Damian has brought me several letters which have come for him, and I don't know where to forward them."

"There is a screw loose somewhere in his head! We shall have to wait until you hear from him again, and I beg of you as soon as you receive his address to send it to me immediately."

"Never fear, Butron, but you also must not fail to do likewise by me, if you receive his address first."

"Oh!" replied Butron, with much gallantry, "it would be impossible for Jacob to commit such a blunder."

"Ah! no, no, Butron!" said Currita, with a melancholy accent; "don't imagine that I delude myself in the least. I know very well there is no more dangerous rival for a woman than gambling, or the hope of a cabinet portfolio."

And here they both stopped, thoroughly convinced that they had mutually deceived each other; she, furious, believing that Jacob, in league with Butron, had gone away in the interests of the party without saying a word to her; and he, suspiciously imagining that Currita and Jacob had freed themselves from his patronage by constituting an independent Canton, acting upon their own responsibility in political matters. A sudden interruption prevented them from exploring further, or with the same facility, their respective fields.

A servant entered carrying a large case of very dark red velvet, a magnificent present for the kermis which had just

been brought at this unseasonable hour, with the preconceived idea, doubtless, that it should be seen and admired by all the brilliant assemblage. Gorito Sardona, Mico of honor upon this occasion, took the case from the hands of the servant and laid it upon the table, calling to Currita at the top of his voice. The latter came quickly, followed by the diplomat, and a slight cry which seemed to be of admiration, but which was in reality of fear and surprise, escaped her at the sight of the case. It instantly recalled to her another, exactly similar, with the only difference that upon the dark velvet lid of the other, beneath a Marquis's coronet, was a curious *S* of incrusted gold, and upon this lid, in the same place, the velvet was only somewhat crushed. She stood, nevertheless, for three seconds, silently contemplating the case without daring to open it; everybody flocked around her, crowding and pressing her up against the table, anxious to see the wonderful gift, until there was nothing left for her to do but to press the spring and raise the lid.

A general exclamation of amazement escaped all present, drowning the murmur of rage and indignation which swelled in Currita's throat. Upon the white velvet which lined the interior, the masterpiece of Henri de Arfe stood out in all its magnificence, the antique chiselled silver frame, which she had presented to Jacob in this very case, with her own portrait as Japanese queen. The latter had disappeared, and in its place was another strange photograph, representing a camellia of natural size, and leaning upon it as upon a window-ledge, was the bust of the fairy woman known to them all, resting her left cheek upon both crossed hands, looking straight before her with provoking insolence, and sticking out her tongue with an expression of consummate impudence at all who looked at the picture, no matter from what point of view; underneath, in a very good English handwriting, was written: —

"To Her Excellency the Countess of Albornoz.

"Mlle. de Sirop."

No one said a word, nor made a comment. In the embarrassing silence which exposes great shames, only the soft little voice of the Countess of Albornoz was heard, who said somewhat nervously: —

"Mademoiselle de Sirop? How delicious! She must be a cousin of the elixir Henry Mure, which has been recommended to Fernandito."

CHAPTER VIII

Jacob's awakening was joyous; the night before he had won more than five thousand dollars playing at the Casino until four o'clock in the morning. There is, however, something in man which awakens before his reason or his senses, and raises its voice and cries aloud; nor is it silenced even in those moments of half-awakening, in which one's ideas float like loose threads, before the yet sleeping will has had time to tie them, or straighten them, or twist them at its command. This something is called remorse, which, with its poignant prick placed before Jacob's eyes, even before the five thousand dollars, the terrified faces of the wife and children of him who had lost them; of him who, though the father of a family, was a professional gambler, marked with that seal of misfortune common to those of his class, which, because it is misfortune sought after, only excites anger towards them, instead of compassion. It has been said that in gambling gains there is always something similar to robbery, for it can be truly said that one takes his neighbor's goods against the will of their owner; and if it be true that one wins this money by risking his own, it is also equally true that bands of robbers risk their lives in the byways and highways; and a life, although it be only that of a thief, is worth more than money. Jacob turned over in his bed, drowning these reflections by an effort of his already awakened will, and rang his bell, muttering between his teeth: —

"Amar á nuestro prójimo
Nos manda la doctrina
Y al prójimo en la guerra
Le dan contra una esquina."

"To love our neighbor
Christ's doctrine demands;
Of our neighbor in war
We wash our hands."

Damian came in, bringing with him as usual the mail and the daily papers, which he placed within Jacob's reach upon the night-table. He then opened the blinds, drew the curtains, and went into the dressing-room to prepare the bath and lay out the gentleman's clothing. It had already struck half-past twelve. Jacob was very lazy, and it cost him a great effort to tear himself from his bed; he turned over in it several times, stretching himself and moving about from side to side, with the lassitude of one who has no cares or obligations awaiting him, who finds no other formula with which to greet the new day, no other prayer or outburst of sentiment, than a prolonged yawn. He at last decided to stretch forth a hand, and took the various letters from the table; there were five or six of them, and presently his attention was attracted by a large square one which bore the Congressional seal, and, as he thought he detected by its touch, contained, besides the enclosed letter, a small round object. He turned it over, examining the envelope on all sides, with that foolish perplexity which, upon receiving a letter in an unknown handwriting, moves us to conjecture and to guess at that which by only breaking the seal we could know at once. He finally opened it, tearing the envelope to pieces, and his doubts were then succeeded by surprise and amazement; he found a blank sheet of very thick paper, folded in two, to the upper part of which carefully glued was a large seal of green wax about the size of half a *duro*.[1] At first Jacob could not distinguish

[1] Coin equivalent in value to one American dollar. — Tr.

well what it was; the light came in very feebly, penetrating through the balcony blinds and the long lace curtains embroidered in one solid piece, which hanging from the lambrequins of yellow damask swept the floor. With great anxiety he sat up quickly, leaning out of bed to obtain a better light, and could then make out in all its details the seal's device: it was the square and the compass crossed in the form of a pentagraph, with the branch of acacia, — the emblem of the Masons.

A horrible suspicion and terrifying idea, of already convincing aspect, at once flashed through his mind. He sprang with a bound out of bed, and ran to the balcony in order to examine in a still better light the strange letter and the mysterious seal. There was no doubt of it; if not the same, it was exactly similar to one of those he had, at the Grand Hôtel in Paris, torn from the documents intrusted to his care at the lodge in Milan. What, then, did this mean? Was it a joke, a warning, or a menace?

With his eyes wide open, he stood looking out on the street, as if he there sought the solution to his doubts and answer to his fears. Directly opposite his own was the Marquis of Riera's large house, for many years closed, with that air of secrecy and mystery about it which edifices abandoned for a long time seem to assume, making one's imagination picture behind its walls memories of crimes and ghostly visitants. The day was gloomy; one of those days of drizzling and incessant rain in which one sees only mud-puddles in the street, and dark, motionless, and lowering clouds in the sky, which seem to lick the towers and cupolas like the glutinous spittle of some immense monster. The passers-by wended their way hurriedly along the sidewalks armed with umbrellas and mackintoshes, wading through the mud which splashed the tucked up skirts of the women and the turned up trousers and top-boots of the men. A captain of lancers, very stout and ruddy, now passed, coming from the direction of the Puerta del Sol, and walking very heavily with his spurs and spats stained with mud, and his short

blue cape, lined with white, wet through and through. It occurred to Jacob that this officer was a trooper who must be going to the War Department, and he watched him very attentively. But the officer turned the corner by Riera's house, slipping and sliding, and disappeared down Calle Turco. Ah! Calle Turco! In it, four years before, there had been an assassination, *another* assassination, in the person of a famous man, and friend, who had always done him favors, the favors of one wolf to another, but favors none the less. The hand of the Masons could then be detected in that affair also, and he, ah! he knew well enough what to expect. For that reason he had been obliged to flee in all haste, impelled by destiny, unhappy destiny, which had carried him off to Constantinople, only to fall into another pool of blood and to be obliged to undertake again another flight to Italy, and France, and Spain later on.

Jacob felt very cold, an intense and natural chill, for he was half dressed, which seemed to penetrate his flesh to the marrow of his bones, and even to his very soul, with a glacial and disagreeable sensation, similar to that of a dagger's blade plunging into one's breast. He got into bed again, muffling himself up in the warm blankets and hiding his face in the pillows, that he might think, and reflect, and meditate, and not look towards the hollow of the balcony, where he seemed to see General Prim, and the Cadi's wife Sarahi, with the strangled eunuch, joining hands and courtesying like the actors before the curtain when they receive an ovation at the end of the play. He, who had awakened so joyfully, planning the way to hide from his creditors the knowledge of his five-thousand-dollar gain!

Damian discreetly showed his head, asking if his Lordship intended to get up, because the hot water was getting cold.

"Yes! yes! I am coming," replied Jacob. And while putting on his slippers, and wrapping himself up in a very warmly lined dressing-gown, he reflected that the surest way of getting at the bottom of the affair was to ask Uncle Fras-

quito what he had done with those three seals which he had given him at the Grand Hôtel. After this he became more calm, almost serene. Without doubt the whole thing would turn out to be a stupid joke. True, he had experienced in this arduous business what all impetuous characters experience; once the first step is taken, they afterwards fall into the utmost apathy, abandoning the plans made in such haste and undertaken with so much warmth. And it was not probable either that after the lapse of a year and a half of absolute silence and complete forgetfulness, the Masons would reclaim the papers by initiating their petition with a ridiculous little joke. Very like them indeed, to send him a little seal! And moreover, — deuce take it! — they had intrusted to him certain papers for King Amadeo, and King Amadeo had flown. Was it to be expected that he should run hither and thither in search of the deposed king? And what right also had the Spanish Masons to ask explanations of him, when he belonged to the Italian sects? For the letter was certainly from Madrid, inasmuch as the Congressional seal stamped it. All utter nonsense! Away with fears! He was in the right, confound it! for God helps those who help themselves! and he who is first come is first served.

Damian prepared to shave him as usual, and upon feeling the cold steel upon his throat, he could not restrain a shudder of fright. A slight knock or sudden movement, and the blood would flow, death would come, and life be ended then and there, without help or hindrance, irremediably gliding from agony into the frightful shadow of that which is called eternity, the news of the crime of Calle Alcalá flying through Madrid, as four years before had flown the news of the unpunished and mysterious crime of Calle Turco. And this slight knock or sudden movement might be given by Damian's hand, bribed by some of the Masons' gold. For how did he know who Damian was? A rascal probably, and rogue like all the rest; for, judging others by himself, there could be only two classes of men: those who are hung, and those who deserve to be.

He laughed finally at his wild fancies, and now entirely dressed, asked for his hat and gloves and an umbrella.

"Will your Lordship breakfast at home?"

"No."

"The coachman is awaiting orders."

"Let him go, and come back at four o'clock." And he went towards the door, but turned back the next moment. What foolishness! Perhaps in some one of those other letters, which he had forgotten in his trepidation, he might find some clue or explanation of the stupid joke. He opened first one and then another, and one by one flung them furiously aside upon the large white bear-skin at his bedside. Nothing! absolutely nothing, but an invitation to a ball, a letter from Angelito Castropardo asking him to go with him that evening to a supper with the opera bouffe actresses of the Arderius theatre, and the dissertation of an exasperated creditor who threatened him with seizure.

The rain, drizzling slowly and steadily, continued falling, penetrating and chilling to the bone, as a sad and monotonous thought which cannot be dispelled chills and freezes one to the very heart. At Cuatro Calles, opposite the ruins, centuries old, of Calle Seville, now covered like those of Italica with the yellow *jaramago*,[1] Jacob took a cab, in order to avoid the crowd of people, invariable at this point, who came and went, forming upon the sidewalks interminable strings of men, women, and children, all hidden on this particular day beneath their umbrellas, which, going and coming and crossing each other, looked like a long procession or fantastic *contradanza* of phenomenal mushrooms. Ten minutes later he alighted at Uncle Frasquito's door.

Combed, dyed, and shining from pure cleanliness, the latter was breakfasting in his elegant dining-room, heated by a splendid fire which was blazing away in a magnificent fireplace of black marble, piled high with wood. With the affectionate eagerness with which all those anxious to gossip

[1] Sort of vine. — Tr.

receive any one who can serve as an audience, the old man received Jacob, ordering another cover to be laid at once. He was dying to give vent to his feelings, for the storm of annoyance through which he had passed the day before had not as yet subsided within him. Diogenes and his little jokes were going entirely too far, and if there were authorities in Madrid, or a government in Spain, they would punish him with at least imprisonment for life. For the outrage of the day before he deserved in the name of Justice to have his right hand cut off. Making fun in that way of all the ladies in Madrid, assembled together for a pious object! And exposing to ridicule three, or rather two, estimable persons, — for Pulido was a *parvenu* and a cad, who well deserved all he got. It seemed incredible that Pepe Butron, a man of so much sense, should have made such a *faux pas*, and, doubtless, it was Pulido who gave him the bad advice. Imagine proposing Maria Villasis for President! Why, even an imbecile would never have conceived such an idea!

And of course the result was what it naturally would have been, that the dissembling hypocrite had ruined everything and with most insufferable daring and insolence; alluding, of course, to poor Curra when she said, with a fiendish little laugh, that her modesty prevented her from being President when there was such a worthy Vice-President. And poor Curra was silent, prudently silent, but one could easily tell that she profoundly resented it.

Here he paused, swallowed a big mouthful, prepared another very large one, and said meanwhile: —

"But you are not eating, Jacob. You have taken nothing but the oysters."

"I am not hungry."

"Nor I either.[1] Of course, the best thing that could happen, has happened; for if my niece Villasis had been President, the works of the association would have been reduced to novenas and triduums and paltry alms collected by

[1] From now on, the double *rr*'s peculiar to Uncle Frasquito's mode of speech will be suppressed, for the convenience of the reader. — Tr.

the members at the church doors. And not even this indeed; for I myself, my very self, heard her say" — and Uncle Frasquito, with an imposing gesture, pinched one of his own ears — "that it was a scandalous profanation to station decoys of pretty girls at the church doors. Just imagine what a view to take of things! But after all, the poor soldiers will not be left unaided, and what they may be deprived of by the perfect widow on one hand, they will obtain through the wicked Samaritan on the other. For Curra, with that big heart of hers, has gone into the thing with her whole soul; and as for the kermis, it will be a great financial success. Last night you were not there, and, of course, do not know what took place, but they are now discussing where to have it; some say in Martinez's silver shop, and others say the Royal Theatre. What do you think?"

Jacob, weary of all this vapid and effeminate gossip was on the point of saying he thought the best place would be in the end of a horn; Uncle Frasquito, seeing he did not reply, hastened to add: —

"I think the Royal Theatre. The Paris kermis for the benefit of the inundated inhabitants of Szegedin took place at the Opera House and was a brilliant success. But, frankly speaking, I am afraid of Diogenes; he will certainly be there, and I am afraid of him. For what is one to do, if not even the resource of defying him is left?"

"Why not?" replied Jacob, laughing in spite of himself. "Defy him yourself and chop his ears off."

"Ah! indeed! There would be nothing left of me if I did!" exclaimed Uncle Frasquito, full of belligerent ardor. "It would be impossible! Do you know what happened to Paco la Granda, another animal like himself? Well, Diogenes got up a plot against him, and Paco sent him his seconds. Diogenes said all right, he would fight; but as the choice of weapons fell to his lot, he decided that the duel should be with cannon-shots. Just imagine it! Paco then sent to say that wherever he met him he would knock him down. Diogenes answered for him to come near him if he

dared. And he did dare, but for what, Jacob, for what? So that the beast Diogenes, as he is so enormous, might give him a blow which broke two of his ribs. Yes, two ribs! and don't imagine that I exaggerate."

And Uncle Frasquito, brimming over with indignation, rubbed with the back of his hand the place where, natural or artificial, his own ribs ought to be. Jacob said nothing, and the old man, beginning to notice his pre-occupation, politely made him a sign that breakfast was over and that he had already detained him too long.

"I believe, after all, the kermis will take place at the Opera House," he said. "I am going now to Curra's house so we can decide. How is it that you are not breakfasting there to-day?"

"Because I was obliged to see you."

"Ah!" exclaimed the old man. And he opened his mouth to its full extent, very much startled, for from that fatal night at the Grand Hôtel, when Jacob had discovered the secret of his wig and teeth, he looked upon him and feared him with that nervous fear which the person always inspires who, by only loosening his tongue a bit, can ruin our reputation or our fortune. Uncle Frasquito did not desire his death; but he would have seen him descend into the tomb with pleasure, provided he carried the secret with him. Jacob asked: —

"Do you remember the night your nightcap caught fire in the Grand Hôtel?"

Uncle Frasquito, now thoroughly alarmed, thought to himself, "Murder will out," and changing color, nervous and full of anxiety, he glanced at the servants, saying in a low voice: —

"Psch! Be careful, man! We will have our coffee in the boudoir, and there no one will disturb us."

For Uncle Frasquito also had his boudoir, a veritable boudoir, such as any lady of fashion might have, filled with all those knick-knacks which the French call *bibelots*, and which have taken the place, in modern palaces, of antique works of

art. The latter, however, were not wanting, the most conspicuous among them being the portrait of a gentleman, type of arrogant and manly beauty, painted by Van Dyck in England, at the same time as his famous portrait of Charles I.; an admirable likeness, in which is reflected, together with the monarch's pride, a species of foreboding of his tragic end. The former personage was the fifth Duke of Aldama, ambassador to London from the Court of Philip IV. Uncle Frasquito was the third son of the twentieth duke of the same name. At the foot of the portrait was a dagger, and a sword in its scabbard of exquisite workmanship and great value, which had belonged to the nobleman. Directly opposite, and placed in an excellent light, was an embroidery frame of polished mahogany, upon which Uncle Frasquito, grandson in the nineteenth century to his sire of the seventeenth century, was embroidering in tapestry an elaborate pair of slippers.

The coffee was served. Jacob had thrown himself indolently into an easy chair, his right leg flung over the arm of it, and had begun to smoke the excellent cigar which Uncle Frasquito had given him. The latter mysteriously produced a dainty gold snuff-box set with diamonds, with Queen Marie Louise's portrait upon the lid, and took a pinch of snuff, making wicked grimaces meanwhile.

"It is my only vice," he said; "it is a secret, no one knows it. 'Péché caché est tout à fait pardonné.'" And he sneezed three times, hoping by the faces and grimaces he was making to distract from Jacob's mind the accursed idea of the singed cap; but the latter, as soon as the servants had left the room after serving the customary Jamaica rum, again asked: —

"Do you remember that night?"

Uncle Frasquito replied with a timid and shame-faced "Yes," as if the question recalled some heinous crime.

Jacob continued: "Do you also remember some wax seals, two green ones, and a red one, which I gave you that same night?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Uncle Frasquito, much relieved.

"What have you done with them?"

"They are here in my album. Do you wish to see them?"

"Yes."

Uncle Frasquito's fears now dispelled, he turned quickly and drew towards Jacob a beautiful easel upon which rested a large folio like a choir-book, whose handsome binding was a most finished work of art, a mosaic done upon shagreen leather, representing strange drawings in very bright colors. The whole formed a combination worthy of competing with any of the elaborate antique bindings to be found in the Vatican Library. The book was secured by a large clasp of open-work steel, representing the coat of arms of the Aldama family, surmounted by the ducal crown of the head of the house.

"There is no other collection equal to it in Europe. It stands first," said Uncle Frasquito, opening the volume with the enthusiasm of an amateur with a new fad. And he began to look through the index, the book being divided into various parts; there were royal, national, individual, and miscellaneous seals. Uncle Frasquito looked in the miscellaneous list and finally came across "Masonic Seals, — Marquis of Sabadell, — page 117;" for the collector was civil enough always to write under each donation the name of the donor.

Page 117 was at last found. Uncle Frasquito looked at Jacob stupefied, and Jacob, horribly pale, looked at Uncle Frasquito. The numerous little spaces on the page were filled with seals, with the exception of two, which were blank. In both were written "Masonic" above, and "Marquis of Sabadell" below. The seals had disappeared, and one could discern upon the fine vellum the traces of the gum with which they had been secured. Jacob, with a gesture of fearful anxiety and in a choking voice, said: —

"The other, the red one, where is it?"

Uncle Frasquito, frightened upon seeing Jacob's emotion, did not dare open his lips, fearful lest some great catastrophe

was pending, and began to look hurriedly among the royal seals, murmuring confusedly: —

"It was Victor Emmanuel's, I remember well. It must be among the sovereigns of Italy. I put it between a Duke of Parma and a Ferdinand of Naples, because 'Italian Unity' does not exist for me."

After much fumbling about, he turned at last to page 98, which was full of royal seals, and between one of the last reigning dukes of Parma and another of Ferdinand of Naples was another blank space. Above it was written, "King of Sardinia," and below, "Marquis of Sabadell."

Jacob struck a vigorous blow with his fist on the arm of his chair, saying in a hollow voice: —

"You have ruined me!"

"Great heavens! Jacob, my boy! For God's sake tell me what has happened!" exclaimed Uncle Frasquito, half dead with fright.

"You have ruined me! ruined me!" reiterated Jacob.

And under the influence of the fear and confusion which possessed him, he confided with his usual want of tact to the foolish old man, if not the guiltiest, at least the most dangerous part of his Masonic adventure. Uncle Frasquito, terror-stricken, and imagining he saw Masonic poniards darting up through the soft carpet, began to pace about excitedly, stumbling around in all directions like a rabbit blinded by the sunlight.

"Alas! alas! What perverse fate! Of course, Jacob, you know very well I did not wish to take the seals. Don't you remember? You offered them to me, but I did not want to accept them. To oblige, and to please you, I did so, but I repent. I do not need them, nor do I wish to have anything to do with the gentlemen to whom they belong. Do you understand? You cannot count upon me, for I will tell everything and wash my hands of the affair."

Suddenly he stopped, and struck himself forcibly on the forehead, as one who suddenly puts one and two together; his terror increased, and he was obliged to sit down.

"Now I understand! Now I can fully explain, and see it all. Great heavens, what have I done to deserve this?"

"What do you mean?" said Jacob, anxiously. The latter's emotion seemed to have taken possession of Uncle Frasquito, and the poor old man, knowing his own weakness, decided to seek support in his stronger companion. He grasped Jacob by the arm, and led him stealthily to his bedroom, a smiling nest, tapestried in light-blue Persian silk; the floor was strewn with white rugs, while his bed of rosewood, very low and aerial, was a vague combination of Holland laces and delicate blue silk, like a crested wave of the sea. There was also an exquisite chiffonier of rosewood, with silver fastenings, where Uncle Frasquito kept his important papers. He pulled open a little drawer and took out a package of letters.

All these he had received within the last three months! It was enough, indeed, to drive even the coolest person mad. At first they annoyed him, then made him angry, and now, at this moment, actually terrified him, and made his hair stand on end!

"One day I remember well; it was the ninth of December. I received by mail a letter from St. Petersburg." And Uncle Frasquito drew out from the package the top letter, whose stamp really bore the likeness of Czar Alexander II.

"I opened it wonderingly and found this." While speaking, he spread before Jacob's astonished eyes a blank sheet of paper, in the centre of which was written the single word, "IDIOT!"

An irresistible sense of the ridiculous overcame all Jacob's terrors, and he laughed heartily. But Uncle Frasquito very disconsolately said to him: —

"You laugh? Well, just wait. All night long I lay thinking, 'Idiot in St. Petersburg?' and I racked my brains, and passed a sleepless night, without being able to solve the enigma. The next morning another letter came. From where do you think? From Chinchon, Jacob, Chinchon! I

opened it and found the same word, *Idiot!* The following day another letter from Fuente Ovejuna, in the province of Cordova, with the same refrain. In fact, my boy, every day since then, without fail, letters have come in different handwritings and from different places, even the most remote corners of the globe, France, England, Alcarcón, Germany, Chinchilla, and Calcutta, — understand, Calcutta, — Constantinople, and even from Terrones, a little village with only three houses, in the province of Salamanca, and all bearing the same device, *Idiot!*

"One day, the twentieth of January, I remember it perfectly! I was more tranquil. The mail came, but without the letter. That same afternoon I went to the night-table for something, and there, inside the drawer, I found a letter which contained the word, *Idiot!* Now tell me if all this is not enough to set one crazy, and if it does not reveal a terrible mystery, which your letter with the seal is beginning to explain."

It was beginning to dawn upon Jacob also that no one in Madrid or in the whole world, unless it were Diogenes, would be capable of playing on this poor fool a joke of such duration, which must necessitate unlimited patience, and above all a most extensive acquaintanceship with difficult and complicated means of communication. With undisguised wonder, he asked: —

"Have you really received one every day?"

"Not one is missing! Sometimes, especially if the letter had come from a great distance, two or three days would elapse before I received it, but it always turned up in the end with the others. Yes, I assure you not one is missing! Here they are, count them," he added, with an accent of deep dismay, spreading them all out upon the table. "You will find there is a letter for every day, from the ninth of December to the fifteenth of March, which is to-day; there are ninety-seven days in all, February having only twenty-eight, which makes ninety-seven *Idiots!* This came to-day." And he drew out of his pocket a letter from Chiclana, in the province

of Cadiz, which also contained the prophetic word and mysterious warning!

Jacob's situation was not one conducive to much merry-making, and he very soon checked the fit of hilarity which had been elicited by this most persistent joke, which no other than Diogenes could have perpetrated. He also repented of having confided part of his secret to Uncle Frasquito, upon hearing the old man's cowardly threats, and resolved to insure his silence by making him believe that he himself was also in imminent danger. He examined the letters attentively, scarcely being able to restrain, in spite of his troubles, another outburst of laughter, and said at last with an air of profound conviction: —

"Not a doubt but this is the work of the Masons! They sentence me for what I did, and call you an idiot for shielding me."

"But it is not true!" cried Uncle Frasquito, very much excited. "I did not shield you, and only took the seals because you gave them to me."

"Which means," pursued Jacob, without heeding him, "that if they apprehend me, they will give you a thrashing as soon as they lay hands upon you."

Uncle Frasquito's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he exclaimed, half whimpering: —

"I shall inform the governor of Madrid! and shall speak to Paco Serrano!"

"Which would be to walk of your own accord into the lion's den, for they are both birds of a feather. See here, Uncle Frasquito, there is only one way out of this. In the first place, hold your tongue, and do not even breathe to your shadow what is going on."

"You can depend upon me for that."

"Very well. In the second place, be generous with your pocket-book, for, my dear friend, with a full purse all is possible, and Masons or no Masons, money can do wonders."

Uncle Frasquito made a gesture of resignation, like a patient about to have a tooth drawn, and Jacob continued: —

"In the third place, act with great caution in following up the clew. In this way we will get on. Who do you suspect can have stolen the seals?"

Uncle Frasquito began to make superhuman efforts to collect his thoughts. He was positive that only a fortnight before all three seals had been there; for he had gone through the album thoroughly, when he was showing it to the Baron of Buenos Ayres, another amateur like himself, and had then noticed no vacant spaces whatsoever. A few days afterwards some man recommended by his shirt-maker came to see him, who was extremely anxious to sell him three very curious stamps. He then once more glanced through the album, and since then had not touched it."

"Who was this person?"

"I have no idea. Some poor hungry-looking devil, who might be most anything."

"Here at last is a clew to the mystery!" exclaimed Jacob, with much interest. "Did you leave him alone? Did he touch the album?"

"No, of course not. Ah! yes, yes, Jacob! Now I remember. Vicentito Astorga called, and I received him in the drawing-room, so that he might not see such a shabby-looking fellow, and he was left alone for more than ten minutes, at the very least."

"Well, it is evident we are now on the right track! Let us go at once to the shirt-maker's."

Uncle Frasquito's victoria was already at the door, and they both drove to the shirt-maker's, an honest merchant who lived in Calle de Carretas. He also was ignorant of the incognito's identity, and only knew he was an Italian commission merchant, the friend of a Frenchman who had business relations in the perfumery branch of their house. Upon hearing the nationality of the unknown one, Jacob's anxiety reached its height, for it seemed to him quite evident that the Spanish and Italian lodges were cognizant of the affair. He accordingly informed Uncle Frasquito that it was useless to investigate further, and both returned

silent and thoughtful to the latter's house. On the way, Jacob's dormant activity was awakened at the thought of danger, and in that brief drive he mapped out a daring plan, the only one to his mind which could atone for past follies, and stay the consequences of his imprudent apathy. That same night, without taking leave of any one, or giving to any one a reason for his departure, that they might not suspect the object of his journey, he would set out for Italy and have a business interview in Caprera with Garibaldi, who had formerly initiated him in the Milan lodges, and before him would try to vindicate the sequestration of those documents by inventing some artful story, or lie, anything at all, which would once for all put him out of this false and painful position. Money he did not lack, counting the five thousand dollars won the night before; and Uncle Frasquito's mint was also at his disposal. He accordingly explained part of his plan to the afflicted old man, upon reaching the latter's house, and concluded by saying that, inasmuch as they ran a common risk, it was only just that both should defray the expenses, and that Uncle Frasquito must hand over without loss of time two thousand dollars in bank notes; the journey would require two weeks, and upon his return they would square up accounts and share like brothers the expenses which the undertaking might demand.

Uncle Frasquito was very much annoyed, reflecting that the three stamps had cost him dearly; but won over at last by Jacob's reasonings, warnings, and threats, he produced the extorted money, and took leave of his companion with a wry face. Upon finding himself alone, his fears redoubled; he felt ill and went to bed, giving strict orders for no one to be admitted. The following morning his mail contained a letter from Segura, a little village celebrated for its cheeses, hidden away in the most rugged nook of the Guipuzcoa mountains; in it was written, *Idiot!*

His fever rose two degrees, and he sent for the parish priest. He wished to be shriven.

CHAPTER IX

The toll-keeper who collects the tax at the summit of the mountain de los Meagas, confidentially informed José Ignacio Bernaechea, that never had a more elegant coach, handsomer horses, or more reckless people, crossed from St. Sebastian to Zumarraga. Even yet, afar off, at the foot of the mountain could be heard the strident notes of the coach-horn, which resounded among these high mountains in a strange and profane manner, like a burst of loud laughter in a temple, a joke during a prayer, or a bacchanalian hymn between the solemn and prolonged notes of a Gregorian chant.

For this wild and solemn scenery, with its deep valleys fertilized by labor and sanctified by churches, watered by little rivulets and dotted with tiny villages sunk in a sea of verdure, upon which the lights and shadows came and went, always green, always beautiful and sublimely melancholy, as is the mysterious idea of the Maitagarris in the imagination of the Vasco peasant, has something of the silent majesty of a temple, and the serene sadness of an autumn landscape which seems to smile and weep at the same time. It is like the soft melancholy which inundates the soul at eventide, when the church bells ring out the Angelus, and day fades away, whispering to man that word a thousand times repeated with never a thought of its infinite meaning, *Adios!* [1]

The descent was dangerous, owing to the steepness of the declivity and the suddenness of the turnings, and the six horses of the turnout pressed hard on their bits, bending their graceful heads to their chests, and vigorously inflating their powerful flanks, the sweat oozing from beneath their glittering harness like white foam. The axle grated inces-

[1] God be with you; or, good-bye. — Tr.

santly, from the motion of the pole rising and falling, and Leopoldina Pastor, seated upon the highest seat of the elegant tally-ho coach, screamed like one possessed, shrieking out that those "good-for-nothing" horses would certainly, pitch them headlong down the mountain-side. Seated by her side was Uncle Frasquito, with a very fine pocket-handkerchief dangling from his straw hat to protect his complexion from the sun. He looked with a frightened expression at the height of the precipice, and at every lurch of the coach clung to the sides of the seat, exclaiming wildly: —

"Curra, for Heaven's sake, take care! take care!"

Upon one of the back seats, Maria Valdivieso, Paco Velez, and Gorito Sardona were roaring with laughter, disputing among themselves the honor of blowing upon the sonorous coach-horn a diver's blast, to warn the peaceful villagers and dignified oxen, the modest wayside basket-vendors and the drivers of carts laden with ferns, that they must clear the way, withdraw to one side, or scatter pell-mell in any direction, because the Countess of Albornoz's tally-ho with six horses required unobstructed the whole of the Guipuzcoa highway. Upon the last of the rear seats, extended like an inert mass, was a man enveloped in a lady's water-proof cloak, which the rays of the sun scorched and blistered. With every movement of the coach, he tottered in great danger of falling, and coughed with that kind of asthmatic sound peculiar to inebriated old men when sleeping off the effects of a debauch.

Upon the central seats, among sundry hampers, boxes, and the various parts of a small camp-tent, were Kate, the Countess of Albornoz's English maid, Fritz, her Prussian groom, and Tom Sickles, her famous coachman, who, without losing his English dignity, looked uneasily from time to time at the not altogether skilful way in which his illustrious mistress's feeble little hand was managing the fiery team. For the Countess of Albornoz in person had herself driven the powerful brutes from Biarritz, whence the convoy

had started the evening before, all of them preferring the hardships of this excursion by the highway to the comfortable journey by rail, because of one of those caprices or eccentricities which the laws of fashion dictate, and which constitute the rules of good form, based the majority of times upon the following philosophic and profound reasoning: —

"Cuando pitos, flautos;
Cuando flautos, pitos."

Seated by her side on the box-seat was the Marquis of Sabadell, most affable and affectionate, screening the lady from the sun with a large parasol of heavy, red taffeta silk, and constantly on the lookout to rectify with his vigorous hand whatever careless move the aristocratic coachwoman might make in her arduous task of guiding the team. Only too soon an occasion presented itself. At a sudden turning the sunshade caught in the overhanging branches of an oak-tree, and being wrenched violently away, fell upon the head of one of the horses. The animal took fright, shying abruptly, causing the coach to swerve. It tottered a moment, then remained motionless, the next instant toppling over, and gradually sinking. A cry of terror escaped all, and an old dame who was passing by, leading a little donkey, extended her withered arms and cried out with the energy which faith gives in moments of anguish: —

"Aita San Ignacio . . . Salvaizuzu!"[1]

The danger was imminent; one of the back wheels was off the road, only sustained over the precipice by the trunk of a fallen oak-tree, whose roots, cracking and gradually yielding, tore up large clods of earth at every instant. A moment lost, or a single movement of any of the frightened animals, and coach, horses, and travellers would have rolled down the high embankment, crushing themselves into atoms.

Jacob did not lose his presence of mind, nor Tom Sickles either; the former seized the reins without moving them in the slightest, and the other sprang out of the coach, balanc-

[1] Father St. Ignatius . . . Save them! — Tr.

ing himself to the wheel opposite the sunken one, pulling it with all his might towards the centre of the road. The old dame ran to his assistance, also pulling with her bony arms, which seemed to have sinews as powerful as two cables. Fritz jumped out after Tom, holding by the bridle the frightened horse which was the near one of the wheel pair. Terror had struck all dumb and motionless, no one daring to stir for fear of hastening the catastrophe. The man in the waterproof cloak slept on unconsciously.

At a signal from Tom Sickles, Jacob lashed the horses furiously; Fritz shouting excited them, and the coach, pulled out at last, straining and creaking, tottering a moment towards the precipice, and finally righting itself upon the high-road, gave a most violent jerk, which sent the sleeping man flying from the top of his seat into the middle of the road, where he landed as inert and heavy as a stone. The coach disappeared amidst a thick cloud of dust down the mountain-side, the horses running at full speed until opposite Oiquina, where Jacob at last succeeded in stopping the dusty, sweating, and palpitating animals beneath the shadow of some fig trees. It was none too soon; the oak tree, completely uprooted, fell lengthwise down the steep hill-slope, and hung suspended over the precipice only by some straggling roots. Tom Sickles, unmindful of the man stretched upon the ground, watched the flying coach, clenching his fists, and flinging tremendous oaths in English, not at the horses, but at his illustrious mistress.

Meanwhile Fritz and the old woman hastened to the assistance of the fallen man, at the moment in which the latter, struggling out of the cloak which enveloped him, and sitting up on the ground, revealed the pimply and amazed face of Diogenes, which still bore the traces of the tremendous debauch in which he had indulged the evening before. He looked about him with an air of perplexity, without being able to explain to himself, how, having fallen asleep on top of a coach, he had awakened to find himself sitting upon the ground in the middle of the road. His ach-

ing bones finally revealed to him the cause, and grasping Fritz by the arm, he tried to raise himself, murmuring: —

"*Polaina!* Some one must have given me a thrashing."

He tried to walk, however, without experiencing any serious difficulty, his hat covered with dust in his hand, and the cloak, which was dangling from his left shoulder, dragging behind him. Those on the coach had recovered the power of speech upon seeing themselves out of danger, and were all talking at the same time, commenting upon the event, none of them thinking of thanking God for having snatched them from the jaws of death by a veritable miracle. Only Kate, the English maid, still shrinking into a corner, as white as a sheet, with her hands crossed, eyes closed and head bowed, seemed to be praying under her breath. It was now that they missed Diogenes, and at last saw him coming in the distance, followed by Tom Sickles and the Prussian groom, who was carrying the red sunshade, innocent cause of the mishap.

Prevailing good-humor succeeded in dissipating their fright, and Diogenes was received with shouts of laughter by all except Leopoldina Pastor, who, drowning the laughter with her powerful contralto voice, screamed out furiously: —

"Well, look at the good-for-nothing! how he is dragging my mackintosh. Diogenes! Pick up that cloak! Don't you see you are making a mess of it?"

Diogenes heard her only too well, but tying the cloak around his body with the grace of a toreador girding his cape in order to make with the quadrille the presidential salute, he tried to make a pirouette; a slight attack of vertigo stopped him, however. Passing by the Cestona Spring, another slight fainting-spell attacked him, and Leopoldina Pastor, who always united some bit of absurdity to the impulses of her really good and compassionate heart, tried to induce him to drink two little glasses of these famous medicinal waters. Diogenes answered her with one of his outrageous sallies, which created a general chorus of laughter; he stopped nevertheless at the spring, but only to

drink an enormous mug of ginger, which he took as usual, after first dropping into the bottom of the glass two lumps of sugar. The alcohol revived him, and from Cestona to Azpeytia he gossiped incessantly, commenting upon his tremendous fall, to the great amusement of everybody.

"*Polaina!* Frasquito! suppose it had been you. Eh! comrade? You would have been broken into thirty-two pieces, just the same as a prize-fighter.

"Jump like that at sixty-five years of age! *Polaina!*—" It made him think of another jump, yet more remarkable, which a certain friend of his had once made from a Monday's breakfast to a Thursday's dinner, without even stumping his toe.

They crossed the streets of Azpeytia at full trot, regardless of the Alcalde's proclamations or the fines imposed, running the risk at every step of trampling under foot the poor manufacturers of hempen sandals working upon the thresholds of the shops, or the children playing about in all directions, and finally turned into that branch section of the highway which directly leads to Loyola. In the background, shadowed by the high peak of the Izarraiz, was the majestic pile of the Royal College and Sanctuary, a precious jewel, designed by Fontana and constructed by a queen in order to enclose the house of a saint. In the centre of the grounds, erected upon a pedestal and protected by an iron grating was the statue of St. Ignatius Loyola, son and patron of Guipuzcoa, his hand raised, as if about to bless this country in which his cradle was rocked, and over which the beneficent shadow of his gigantic figure seemed yet to be hovering.

Forming a right angle with the Royal College of Loyola is another edifice, which was constructed about the same time, called La Hospederia.[1] Here travellers usually stop who come to visit the Sanctuary, and here Currita proposed to break the journey by stopping to dine, and to rest a couple of hours, continuing her journey afterwards as far as Zumar-

[1] Monastery Inn. — Tr.

raga, where they would take the express train for Madrid, which passed at half-past five.

The day was magnificent, although somewhat warm, as is generally the case in Guipuzcoa in the latter part of September; and the Countess of Albornoz ordered the table to be set beneath the spacious portico, formed by the eight arches which constitute the entrance to La Hospederia. Stretched out in front of them were the green and smiling meadows full of joyful light, with a little bubbling and playful fountain, which murmured through four ducts. On the left arose the majestic college structure, the proud façade of its church extending like a soldier of Christ, its strong arm holding a crucifix, while its superb cupola was elevated like a brow to heaven, seeking fortitude, inspiration, and light. To the right lay the valley of Azpeytia, watered by the Urola, which, also joyful and smiling, joined the village to the Sanctuary as with a knot of flowers, its gladness beaming over all the melancholy tone of the country, like a garland of roses upon the tomb of a just man, or a sweet smile upon the austere countenance of a Trappist monk. The high Izarrais, green at its base, like life in its springtide, rough and gray at the summit like disillusioned old age, abruptly closed in the background, and in the midst of all, elevated above the ground, unchanging amid joy and sadness, indifferent among rich and poor, was the statue of St. Ignatius, the image of sanctity, ever serene, constant, and tranquil, praying for, and invoking blessings upon all.

A bell resounded within the college and shortly afterwards the travellers witnessed a spectacle common in this spot, but new and strange to them. Down the little staircase leading to the principal entrance, the novices came in procession, three by three, with rosaries in their belts, their bearing modest and eyes cast down. Serene and joyful, they proceeded in the direction of the highway, uncovering their heads with affectionate respect when passing the statue of their founder, and afterwards dispersing in different directions down various roads and pathways. Two or three

groups of very small novices enchanted Leopoldina, who, rising from the table, went outside the portico, napkin in hand, to gain a better view of them, saying enthusiastically: —

"Just see! what cunning little good-for-nothings! They look like toy curates! How tiny and sweet!"

"Why don't you buy them bonbons?" replied Jacob, sourly.

"I certainly would if they would let me! One is almost tempted to snatch up a pair of them like toys for a bric-à-brac stand."

"They would not make bad toys," said Jacob, with suppressed wrath. "The first mistake of the Revolution was to open the way to that *canaille*, letting them form yonder a nursery of intrigants, a veritable *pépinière* of revolutionary hypocrites!"

A heated discussion then ensued touching the Jesuits, in which some authorized texts from Eugène Sue's novel, "The Wandering Jew," were freely quoted, it finally being decided that, dinner over, and while the horses were resting, they would all go to visit the gloomy den. Diogenes, who until then had said nothing, declared most emphatically that he would not accompany them, because he was not accustomed to intrude where people had a right to show him the door, and that if those gentlemen knew their business they would certainly slam the door in the faces of these youths and maidens who threatened to invade their house. They all turned upon him furiously, and he began to scatter right and left shocking impertinences, while Currita, with the dignity of an offended queen, called Fritz, the groom, and bade him go at once to Loyola, to inform the Superior that the Countess of Albornoz would visit their house and Sanctuary between half-past two and three o'clock.

Diogenes, pale and agitated, was speaking in the angry tone he was accustomed to use when in earnest, and rising suddenly from the table, he went into a small shed which led to the stables. Shortly afterwards they saw him come

out again, livid rather than pale, and fall limply upon an iron bench under the archway. Gorito and Leopoldina then approached him, fearing serious consequences from the fall of the morning, and the latter with real concern said to him: —

"Diogenes, you are ill, and must see a physician."

"A physician!" stammered Diogenes, with staring eyes. "I never saw one in my life! Allopathy is like an Armstrong cannon, and homeopathy is an Ambrosio fowling-piece; so go along with your doctors and medicine and I will cure myself."

"We'll call in the veterinary surgeon, then," replied Gorito.

"That is quite another thing; they are more scientific, for they cure the patient without his saying a word. It will not be worth while, however, for I can take care of myself." And ordering a bottle of gin he began to drink glass after glass, throwing in not only two, but three and even four lumps of sugar.

Meanwhile Maria Valdivieso was having a sentimental scene with Paco Velez; for, far from devoting himself to her during the morning's episode, he had thought only of saving himself. Jacob and Uncle Frasquito had entered the inn without saying where they were going, and Currita, left to her idyllic delights, was entertaining herself by throwing bread crumbs to a haughty cock, who strutted about the meadow, followed by several meek-looking hens. A man of modest aspect, with a letter in his hand, approached her at this moment, and asked without ceremony if she was the Countess of Albornoz. The proud lady only deigned to answer by a slight inclination of the head, whereupon the man delivered the letter into her hands, immediately afterwards re-entering the College whence he had come, by the little staircase of the main entrance. Currita read wonderingly these few lines: —

"If the Countess of Albornoz has come to Loyola to confess her sins and beg pardon of God for her misdemeanors,

it will not be necessary to appoint either day or hour, for all are equally convenient. But if she only comes to make this holy house a witness to the scandal of her life, I earnestly beg of her not to impose the unpleasant task of refusing her admittance upon her humble and affectionate servant in Christ, Pedro Fernandez, S. J."

Currita, astonished, sat with the letter in her hand, intently regarding the cock, who, with one foot in the air, head on one side, and his inflamed eye fixed upon her, seemed gallantly to offer her, in case of war, the aid of his spurs. The lady read the letter again, and this time understood one thing; but this was an unheard-of thing for her, which awakened in her soul that feeling of anger, surprise, and desperate rage which a wild colt experiences at the first prick of the spur which rends his flanks, and the first pressure of the bit which controls his wilful course, letting him know that there is some one who can and will and must subject and humiliate him.

She understood that, for the first time in her life, a door had been closed upon her, and by one unknown to her, a poor friar, one Pedro Fernandez. The little fountain which ran bubbling at her side seemed to Currita like an echo of the sarcastic shout of laughter, which the world would raise upon seeing her conquered by Pedro Fernandez. At this moment Jacob's voice resounded at her elbow, and she quickly hid the letter in the pocket of her gown. Jacob was calling his party together, for it was already half-past two, and if they delayed the visit to Loyola, they might reach Zumarraga too late. Currita arose to meet him, walking slowly and saying regretfully: —

"Do you know I am not at all well, and think it would be better to give up the visit."

They all believed her, for her face was pale and changed, and they decided to start immediately for Zumarraga and there rest at the inn a whole hour before the train should come. The gin had completely restored Diogenes, and he began to help Tom Sickles and the Prussian harness the

team, singing with the alcoholic voice of any stable boy, an old tune called "El Mayoral": —

"Vamos, caballeros,
Vamos á marcha,
Al coche, al coche!
Basta de para!"

"Let us be off, boys!
Let us be off!
All aboard! All aboard!
Long enough we have stayed."

Jacob and Currita had taken possession of the box seat, the former this time having the reins, while the others disposed themselves in the same order in which they had come. As they passed the statue of St. Ignatius, Diogenes took off his hat, as he had seen the novices do, and repeated in a very loud voice, with the accent of an affectionate greeting, that beautiful salutation, inspired in the hearts of the Guipuzcoa peasants by their piety, simplicity, and love for the Saint, the glory of their mountains: —

"Aita San Ignacio . . . agur!" [1]

Immediately afterwards, utterly regardless of Currita's furious looks, which threatened to plant him in the middle of the road unless he held his tongue, he began to sing again the verses "El Mayoral." The coach sped along the highway, leaving behind the baths of San Juan, the village of Juin Torrea hidden by its gardens, the convent of Santa Cruz high up on its mountain, and the ruinous Florida palace, where Jean-Jacques Rousseau in person had presided over more than one unlawful assemblage of encyclopedists. They crossed the streets of Azcoitia on a walk, all of them more subdued than in the morning, and again came out upon the highway, flanked by the river, and at this point nearly buried in an extremely wild and narrow glen, formed by two high mountains, covered with gloomy forests, which seemed like armies of trees trying to scale to their summit

[1] Father St. Ignatius . . . good-bye!

to unloose the heart of the clouds, blue at times and vaporous as the floating tunic of a Maitagarri poetess, and again gray and floating, but gloomy as the winding-sheet which covers the rigid features of the dead. The scenery was wild and sombre, and was made awful by the many cataracts of water dashing over the immense boulders, the constant plaint of the river obstructed by rocks, and the absence of the sun, which the two high mountains completely concealed at this hour.

Currita, seated upon the box-seat, as gloomy but not as peaceful as the scene, turned over in her mind the letter from Loyola. She felt a sort of secret irritation, which she could not analyze, nor could she understand by whom it had been inspired ; for by a strange phenomenon which she herself could not explain, the author of the letter and cause of the offence only appeared to her in a secondary capacity, rather as a representative, or instrument of a Being more powerful, who seemed to compel the proud lady to feel ashamed and humiliated and silent. Somewhat further on, upon turning a bend in the road, they saw, standing upon the very brink of the mountain, three of the little novices who had so enchanted Leopoldina. They were not alone. With them was a decrepit old woman, her head covered with the white toque peculiar to the Vasconese peasant-woman, who was trying to lift upon her shoulders, with the aid of the novices, a heavy fagot of wood, which she had dropped upon the ground a moment to recover her breath and rest. Her task was hopeless. She had not gone ten paces when fatigue overcame her, and the fagot of wood, outweighing her strength, again fell to the ground. The woman burst into tears. The novices consulted among themselves a moment, and one of them, the strongest, then took the fagot upon his shoulder and began to climb the rugged slope towards a dilapidated village which could be discerned at the top of the mountain, as small and hidden away as a bird's-nest.

Leopoldina, touched in her own way, cried out exclaiming that those little good-for-nothings were angels from heaven,

and little saints whom one should venerate, and that as soon as she reached home she would send each one of them a pair of black stockings made by her own hands out of the finest wool which could be found. Everybody laughed; Currita, however, was silent, feeling a strange compassion which humiliated her, and which she hastened for that very reason to resist, opposing to its beneficent influence that parapet of inexorable pride which gradually grows in the soul like a fortress of evil. Those three novices, three Pedro Fernandez in embryo, stooping through charity to a beggar, made her understand that the Superior of Loyola might have written that letter through a sense of duty to her, a haughty grandee of Spain; and a sudden light like a flash of lightning, which illumines as well as terrifies, made her clearly see what she had before only suspected, that this rebuff was not inflicted by one unknown to her, a poor friar, or a Pedro Fernandez, and that this door, the first ever closed to her in her life, was not the door of Loyola, but the gate of heaven.

She felt cold, and asked Kate for a light wrap, in which, still silent and pensive, she closely enveloped herself. The light continued to illumine her soul, and by its reflection she seemed to take an abstract view of herself, and to see herself as the entire world must see her, as the unknown Pedro Fernandez must contemplate her, seated upon that box-seat by Jacob's side. She instinctively glanced at the latter, and for the first time in her life he seemed to her what he had never seemed before, an accomplice.

The coach now rattled through the streets of Villareal, crossed the bridge which separated this town from Zumarraga and stopped opposite the station, among sundry diligences and unequipped coaches, at the door of a well known inn, whose vast dining-room on the ground-floor opens out into the public plaza. The ladies retired to a room to refresh themselves; the gentlemen dispersed in different directions, while Tom Sickles and the Prussian lodged the coach and the horses in a neighboring coach-

house, until the following day, when they would drive them to Madrid. It still wanted a whole hour before train time.

Uncle Frasquito, in immaculate toilet, clean and resplendent, with his gloves of very fine suède in one hand and a light wrap belonging to Leopoldina Pastor in the other, entered the dining-room and ordered a currant ice. He never received it, however. One of the waiting-maids ran screaming into the room, without being able to articulate a word, making frantic gestures for him to follow her. In a passage-way near the kitchen, opposite a half-open doorway, Diogenes was lying on his back, his arms crossed, one of his legs doubled under him, and his face overspread with a ghastly pallor, upon which his red and pimply blotches, now livid and almost black, stood out hideously; he looked like a dead man.

Uncle Frasquito screamed and ran, calling to Jacob and Gorito at the top of his voice. All the inn servants hastened to the scene, Jacob with them, looking at his watch with a gesture of extreme annoyance.

"He is even a nuisance about dying," he said, upon seeing himself at Diogenes' side.

Two robust young men, sons of the inn-keeper, bore him away and placed him on a bed in a room on the first floor. The physician came in all haste, instantly summoned, and upon hearing of the morning's fall, and after examining the patient, made an ominous prognostication. It was a cerebral attack, caused by the fall, and if he rallied from the first shock, he must inevitably succumb to the second. The ladies, much affected, did not dare leave their room, much less look at the sick man. Maria Valdivieso, with profound compassion, asked if he looked very ugly. Leopoldina, with unfeigned sorrow, sobbed loudly; presently she said: —

"I wonder if the poor fellow has any money."

Meanwhile the inn-keeper approached Jacob and asked for his orders; but the latter shrugging his shoulders with studied indifference, informed him that neither he nor any

of his party had anything to do with the man, that he was a mere acquaintance, who had taken a seat in their coach at Biarritz without being asked, and that he could not be responsible for him, much less give orders concerning him. The train would soon be due, and having decided to start, after a slight discussion, in which the most cruel selfishness triumphed, they all took their leave. Leopoldina, very ill at ease, begged Currita at least to leave her Prussian groom Fritz in charge of the unfortunate man. Currita replied that if he wished to remain that night, she had no objections. But he would have but a poor night of it, and the following day would be compelled to leave, as Tom could not go to Madrid alone with the six horses. Leopoldina then went to the inn-keeper and said to him with great earnestness: —

"I do not know whether this poor man has any money or not, but if not, please put down to my account everything that may be necessary for him. I am General Pastor's sister and this is my address." And she gave it to him carefully written upon a card. Uncle Frasquito also came forward and earnestly besought the good man to advise him by telegraph and without delay, as soon as the unfortunate man should breathe his last. He gave him his name and address and the cost of the telegram, sixpence.

At nine o'clock that night the invalid seemed to be gradually sinking, and the inn-keeper, frightened, sent for the parish priest, that he might anoint him for death. The crisis passed, however, and towards twelve o'clock, Diogenes opened his eyes to see before him the inn-keeper, a tall, stout, clean-shaven man in a long coat and without a cravat, a most thoroughly characteristic type of the thrifty Guipuzcoan peasant. It was some time before he could realize what had happened, and then a frightful idea flashed into his mind. In a broken and dying voice, which, however, revealed all the agony of terror, supplication, and doubt, he said in an undertone: —

"Will they take me to the hospital?"

The inn-keeper looked at him wonderingly, almost angrily,

and answered, with all the rough honesty of the genuine Guipuzcoan: —

"Stop there, sir! A hospital in Guipuzcoa? Never!"

Diogenes gave a sigh of relief, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER X

Diogenes was not conscious of having received Extreme Unction, and being partly pacified by the inn-keeper's reply, other thoughts began to penetrate through the dense mist which shrouded his mind. At times a heavy stupor and profound lethargy, already a foretaste of death, took possession of his whole being, and scattered here and there those ideas which he had struggled to collect, making them seem like imperceptible luminous spots, floating in a dense fog, slowly fading away, little by little, until all but one were completely extinguished. It was the thought of death, accompanied and surrounded by the uncertainty of eternity, disconsolate as the last agony, sad as a candle burning near a corpse, or terrible as a glimpse of the flames of hell.

The lethargy at times increased, and this awful light, which was light none the less, was also extinguished; and Diogenes, upon seeing himself in the dark, upon feeling himself sink into that sleep which seemed to him the last, into that black shadow and sinister silence in which sight and voice are lost, dug his nails into the sheets and tore them to pieces, as if clinging desperately to the edge of the grave, in which he was about to be buried. His eyes no sooner closed than he awoke with horrible nightmares, as if something uncanny had suddenly touched him; the slightest noises assumed colossal proportions, the rumble of the train seeming like a cataract of molten bronze pouring into his ears, the stage-coach bells like double reverberations of a thousand drum-sticks beating upon his own ear-drums; and the peculiar creaking of the Basque wagons, the *soñua*,

or signal which informs the Basque peasant of the turns of the roads, seemed like an infernal noise which, by a diabolical prodigy, issued from a volcanic ridge of mountains, and which racked his brain horribly. Thus the night passed. A little before dawn the stupor vanished, the lethargy fled with its nightmares, and he fell into a deep sleep, which lasted for more than two hours. A monotonous sound which made his head ache, but which resounded like a friendly echo in his heart, now awoke him. It was the church bell ringing for mass.

Diogenes opened his eyes feeling much better; he raised himself a little, and it seemed to him that he felt almost entirely well; his head was clear, his limbs weak but agile; he even imagined he felt hungry, and the idea occurred to him to order for breakfast a large glass of gin with two lumps of sugar. He looked about him; a little night-lamp was sputtering away upon a table near by, while an elderly woman, seated at the foot of the bed in a large arm-chair, was coughing disagreeably. Through the crevices of the two closed windows, some stray sunbeams were stealing, as if the new day was smilingly advancing on tiptoe to greet the sick man. The latter sat up in bed agreeably surprised, and recovering with his health his jocose good-humor, threw a pillow, the first thing he could lay his hands on, at the old woman, shrieking out at the top of his voice a formidable "*Polaina!*" which made her spring terrified out of her seat, muttering some words in Basque!

He then bade her throw both windows wide open, and the light and fresh air flooded the room; the latter playful as a child, caressing the white hairs of the sick man like an affectionate grandchild, bringing with it the sweet odor of the dew-covered ground, the healthy mountain perfumes and the joyful chirpings of the birds, while the solemn sound of the church bell seemed to be calling to him like a loving voice from on high, "Come! Come!" What foolish fears his had been! What ridiculous terrors those of the night before! Death! Who thinks of dying when

day breaks, when the sun rises in a sky so blue, and when the green and flowery mountains can be seen in the distance bathed in sunlight.

The doctor came in again with the inn-keeper to see him, and Diogenes received them, joking with the former and grunting affectionately at the latter, casting at him expressive glances from his bloodshot eyes, which did not lack tenderness, and which showed the gratitude which the inn-keeper's charitable conduct had inspired in him. The physician, after examining him carefully and asking a number of questions which Diogenes answered half fretfully, half good-humoredly, finally raised the sick man's eyelids, which partly concealed two dilated and bloody pupils lacking convergence, and shook his head ominously. The first attack had passed, but the symptoms of the second were already there, and it was impossible that his already completely alcoholized system could resist its powerful onslaught. He then exchanged with the inn-keeper some words in Basque, to which Diogenes listened, looking from one to the other uneasily. Suddenly without palliative or preliminaries the physician said to him, with peasant bluntness, that death was unmistakably approaching, and that he must make use of these lucid moments which his illness conceded him, to arrange his affairs with men and liquidate his accounts with God.

The blow was cruel, for upon hearing him Diogenes felt that something had been uprooted within him, — his hope of life, the most forlorn, as it is the last of all hopes, and which never is plucked out without leaving behind streaming eyes and a bleeding heart. A movement of fierce anger blinded him, for there is nothing more illogical than terror; and as it seemed to him that this was a barefaced robbery they were inflicting upon him, he turned furiously on the doctor, as if it was he who wished to despoil him, flinging in his face all the injuries and obscenities that anger and horror had awakened in his inmost soul. Frightened and surprised, the doctor and the inn-keeper instantly withdrew,

leaving Diogenes alone, tossing about furiously, for he understood, from the prostration and the agony which followed his paroxysm, that the physician had neither exaggerated nor lied, that death was actually approaching, and that he must either be condemned or capitulate.

It is believed with reason that nothing is more dreadful than to fathom the conscience of a hardened sinner in his death trance. Behind that livid and disfigured visage terrible struggles often ensue, which the powers of evil sustain with the good spirits, frightful phantoms which the conscience evokes, bloody combats which the angel of repentance and the angel of impenitence wage round that petrified soul. This of course is dreadful; but here at least there is a struggle, and where there is a struggle there is always a hope and a probability of conquering, and it is a state less horrible than that other which is often lodged behind those glassy pupils, — the appalling calm of a soul which gradually sinks into eternity, conscious of it, but only engrossed with trivial thoughts with which it seeks to distract its mind, hiding from its own self the frightful abyss until death suddenly wields the scythe and the soul awakens in a twinkling, already chained in the depths of hell. Most deadly lethargy and horrible declivity which, without a miracle of divine grace, leads straight to eternal condemnation, and which is as frightful in these moments as the ominous door before which Dante quailed and hesitated.

This was Diogenes' state upon seeing himself alone; but, furious, exhausted, and spent, he sank back upon the pillows, turning his face to the wall. The thought of hell was the first to flash through his mind, but he instantly banished it, turning his attention instead to the hideous paper on the wall, which, covered from top to bottom with garlands of flowers, had long strings of monkeys entwined among them, climbing to the ceiling, in grotesque attitudes, all holding hands. These ugly little animals looked like little devils to Diogenes, and he began to count them one by one, making superhuman efforts to follow them with his eyes, and

counting in all, as far as he could see, more than five hundred and twenty. The woman who had kept watch during the night was still there, seated in a corner knitting. She was called outside a moment, and it then occurred to Diogenes that he also might be called upon at any moment to render his account; an answer came ready to his lips, taken from one of his thousand shocking stories. A gypsy, an incorrigible thief, once went to confession, and the priest said to him: "What would you do, wretched man, if the Supreme Judge should summon you now to judgment?"

"What would I do? not go, of course!" he replied.

"Not go! not go!" repeated Diogenes; and he at once began to plan a fantastic journey of flight, in which he imagined himself taking his seat in the stage-coach, which had just stopped at the door and the sound of whose sonorous bells pierced his head through and through; he would escape to San Sebastian, whence he would embark for the ends of the earth, fleeing like Cain from that Judge who pursued him, going round and round the earth, again and again, until finally it made him dizzy, producing terrible attacks of nausea during which he already seemed to see the finger of Death, Death! That accursed alarm-clock on the table brought it continually before his mind, the beat of its ominous tic-tac seeming to dispose of his own moments, more fleeting than ever, and, full of rage, he ordered the woman to stop it. The latter misunderstood him, and, thinking he wished to see the hour, hastened to take it to him. Diogenes, snatching it out of her hand in a towering rage, dashed it into pieces against the opposite wall.

Meanwhile, Heaven sent him unexpected aid by the same coach in which he had fancied himself fleeing from the Supreme Judge. In it, returning from Zaldivar, whose medicinal waters she took every year, was the Marchioness of Villasis and her granddaughter Monina, accompanied by the latter's governess, her own maid, and two male servants, an old majordomo who accompanied her upon all her journeys, and an ancient retainer who rode upon the box-seat.

It was her intention to take the Southern express train which passed through Zumarraga at half-past two, in order to reach Madrid that same night.

The inn-keeper immediately engaged in conversation with Don Federico, the majordomo, and, full of Diogenes' presence at the inn, related to him the story of his accident and sad condition. The old man, surprised, hastened to tell the Marchioness this piece of news, which would be of such interest to her; and the latter, profoundly moved, wished to go at once to the dying man. Reflecting, however, a moment, and anxious to be well prepared, she sent for the inn-keeper, that she might be informed beforehand of all the details of the sad accident, whose mournful consequences were apparent. But no sooner did she know the sick man was not expected to last over night, than she felt she had heard enough, and immediately gave orders to Don Federico to suspend the journey and to engage rooms for them all at the inn. She then went into the inn-keeper's private office and quickly wrote to the Superior of Loyola, asking him to send one of the fathers without loss of time, to the assistance of a dying man, whose name and condition she told him. A messenger on horseback set out on a gallop with the letter; and an hour afterwards it was delivered.

The Marchioness now wished to see the sick man; but, fearful lest her sudden presence might cause him some violent emotion, she asked the inn-keeper to break the news of her arrival to him, little by little. They both went up to the room, which opened out upon a corridor, and the inn-keeper timidly peeped in at the door. Diogenes, very much prostrated, his head buried in the pillows, and both arms extended upon the counterpane, was unconsciously rolling the sheets in his hands, for he was beginning to feel again that terrible stupor and ominous lethargy which had tormented him the night before. The inn-keeper advanced a few steps, leaving the door wide open, and said in a loud voice: —

"Sir, you have a visitor."

Diogenes turned his head slightly and stammered out angrily: —

"A visitor? Who? The undertaker? *Polaina!* Let him wait!"

"It is a lady."

"A lady? *Polaina!*" And he blurted out an obscene remark, which almost drove the inn-keeper to despair, and made the Marchioness blush crimson behind the door, that holy blush which so many times rises to the faces of the strong and chaste angels of charity, who serve in the hospitals, without, however, frightening them, or making them fly from the bedsides of certain sick men. The inn-keeper, very much annoyed, wished to end the matter at once and said: —

"It is the Marchioness of Villasis."

Diogenes cried out in a loud voice, a pained cry as if some one had uttered a blasphemy; he tried to spring out of bed, to sit up at least; but he lacked the strength and fell back heavily, raising his arms and wringing his hands, giving vent to unintelligible groans and strange mutterings, which seemed to picture the emotion of a wild beast agonizing in his cave. The Marchioness then advanced, and without fear or disgust pressed between both her own his perspiring hands.

"Maria! Maria!" he exclaimed.

"What does this mean, Perico? What is the matter, old man?" she said softly, bending her face streaming with tears over his disfigured countenance.

"I am dying, Maria. I am dying. You were right, after all. It is not in a hospital, but it is on charity, at an inn."

"What difference does that make? A hospital bed is nearer heaven than that of a palace."

Diogenes, sobbing, was silent, and the Marchioness came a step nearer; the dying man, still sobbing, asked: —

"Where is Monina?"

"She is downstairs. Do you want to see her?"

"Yes! Indeed I do. The little angel! I will give her a

kiss. May I not? It will be the last, Maria! I will only kiss her little shoe, nothing more. Go! for Heaven's sake, I beg of you; let me do it, if it will not disgust you."

The Marchioness, profoundly moved, seemed then to have a sudden inspiration; she disengaged her hands from those of Diogenes, who held them closely, and said: —

"Wait just a little while, and I will bring her to you."

Outside the room she hurriedly wiped the tears from her eyes that they might not alarm Monina, and, holding the latter upon her lap, began to explain to her in a low voice and with much earnestness something of great importance. The child listened with wide-open eyes and that air of profound attention which reveals at times in children an instinct superior to their years for divining the dangerous and the terrible. When her grandmother ceased speaking, she nodded her little head. The former kissed her on the forehead with intense love and repeated again very carefully what she had before said, emphasizing very much certain sentences. Monina, still silent, again nodded. The lady then took her by the hand, and, entering Diogenes' room, lifted her on the bed without saying a word, and left the room, closing the door behind her.

And now what happened? Did this child six years of age really understand her grandmother's commission? Did Diogenes' angel guardian speak through her innocent lips? It is certain that the little child, without being frightened at this horribly disfigured face, already stamped with the agony of death, or without showing repugnance at the foul odors exhaled by the dying man, buried her tiny pink hands in the old man's white whiskers, and pulling them while she spoke, as she used to do long ago, said to him in a very low voice, putting her little red lips close to his ear: —

"I have some cookies, and will give you one. You did n't bring the dolly that says 'papa' and 'mamma;' but grandmother brought me a great big cry-baby dolly and she says you are going to die; and won't you try to confess?

I will pray for you when I pray for my papa and mamma and grandpapa who are in heaven. I am going too. Don't you want to go? Then confess!"

And Monina, her mission accomplished, kissed him on the forehead, slid down off the bed, and made for the door. Diogenes sobbed as if his heart would break; the bed creaked with the violent convulsions of his body; and wringing his hands he stammered out in a gradually failing voice: —

"Yes! Yes! I do! I do! Maria! Maria! Do you hear what the child says? I want to confess! But to whom? My God! to whom? Who will hear my confession? Where is there a place filthy enough to receive my sins? I am infamous, despicable! My God! I repent, I repent!"

And he struck himself on the breast with both closed fists, violent blows, which resounded throughout the whole room and made him cough severely, producing a slight hemorrhage. Monina, all her courage gone, once outside the room, clung with white lips to her governess's skirts, asking in a low voice: —

"Is he dead yet?"

Meanwhile the Marchioness tried to soothe Diogenes, telling him she had already sent in all haste to Loyola for a Jesuit father, who must arrive at any moment. Diogenes exclaimed: —

"I was educated by them, but would never say so; it would disgrace them!"

This violent emotion seemed to have cleared the sick man's mind, but his body resented it, and he was apparently sinking rapidly. The Marchioness asked for a crucifix, and, holding it before him, told him to make his examination of conscience before it, while waiting for the father. Diogenes took it in both hands and kissed it devoutly, but very soon let it fall upon the counterpane, weeping disconsolately: —

"I don't know how, Maria. I have forgotten."

"Never mind. I can teach you in a moment." And with great tenderness she explained to him how to make his

examination of conscience, Diogenes listening to her attentively, and looking from time to time at the crucifix. When the Marchioness ceased speaking, he said to her with the simplicity of a child: —

"I shall surely forget something. It would be better for me to tell everything to you now, and you can tell it afterwards to the father, and, between the two, see if I have left out anything."

"But that is not at all necessary," replied the Marchioness, without being able to restrain a smile. "Do your best to think now, and afterwards the father will help you."

Diogenes lay for a long time silent, holding the crucifix in both hands, his eyes fixed upon it. At times his chest heaved with sobs, and floods of tears coursed down his cheeks. He would then kiss the feet of the crucifix, close his eyes, and seem to be praying. The Marchioness had seated herself at the foot of the bed, in the large arm-chair, and was saying the rosary. The bells of a stage-coach were heard, and the lady made a movement to rise. Diogenes opened his eyes in alarm.

"Maria! Are you going?"

"No. I was only going to see if the father had arrived."

"But you will not go away?"

"No, Perico, no, — don't worry, I am not going."

"Will you stay until I die?"

"Until you die? Yes!" she replied sweetly.

Diogenes closed his eyes, relieved and tranquil, like a child who sleeps within sight of his mother. After a long interval he said: —

"Maria! I can't remember the Credo. How was that part, 'He ascended into heaven, sitteth' — where is He seated?

"At the right hand of God the Father," said the Marchioness, smiling.

"Almighty," continued Diogenes; and then slowly and in a loud voice he finished this act of faith, afterwards kiss-

ing the crucifix with great fervor. The door opened, and the inn-keeper announced that two fathers from Loyola had arrived. The Marchioness wished to go meet them, but Diogenes with great uneasiness hastened to say: —

"Maria! don't go. Let them come in by themselves. Why should you go?"

Through the open door a strange figure entered, which surprised the Marchioness and made Diogenes fall back on his pillows, upon seeing it come towards him with both arms extended. One would have said that Death in person, clothed in a Jesuit's cassock, had presented himself in the room. It was a tall old man emaciated almost to the point of transparency. He wore an old cassock encircled at the waist by a girdle, from which was suspended a rosary, while beneath his cap escaped long locks of white hair. He walked slowly with both hands extended as if he feared stumbling, for he was half blind, and so, tottering at every step, he reached Diogenes' bedside without seeing the Marchioness; here he began to grope about until he touched one of Diogenes' hands. With a childish smile which contrasted strangely with his white locks, and in a voice quavering but sweet, although pinched from constant asthma, he said softly: —

"Perico! My son! It is I; don't you know me?"

Diogenes, astonished, stared at this strange apparition without being able to say a word, and questioned with a glance first the Marchioness and then the younger priest, who had come in behind the old man; the latter added: —

"I am Father Mateu, your inspector in the College of Noblemen. Don't you remember?"

"Yes! Yes, I do!" exclaimed Diogenes, in a loud voice, pressing between his own, without losing hold of the crucifix, this cold withered hand, which he carried with great fervor to his lips. The old man with his serene, childish smile turned towards his companion, saying with intense satisfaction: —

"He remembers! You see, he remembers! I knew he would! I said so."

"Of course I do," said Diogenes, seriously. "You were very good to me and loved me, — ah! yes! very much, — and it was you who taught me to say 'Bendita sea tu pureza,'[1] and afterwards the three Ave Marias which you said would obtain mercy from the Blessed Virgin."

"It is true, true, Perico," replied the old man, gravely, "and in yourself you see the proof, for you must certainly have said them."

"Yes! father, always, always, and I taught them to Monina. Not a single night did I neglect them, even though —"

The old man interrupted him with great vivacity: —

"I knew it. I knew Our Lady would concede you mercy. I prayed for it," and, still smiling, he clasped his hands, raising them to heaven with a beatific expression, "for some time ago Miguelito Tacon told me, when I saw him in Cuba as Captain-General in the year thirty-five, that you were leading a — well — somewhat gay life — and see now how good our Blessed Mother has been! For I feel she has preserved me eighty-six years, Perico, eighty-six years — for this."

Diogenes, more and more prostrated, wept silently; the old man, seeking at random the sick man's hand, added, pressing it with all his feeble strength: —

"Because you wish to see me. Is it not so, Perico? You want to confess?"

"Yes, father, — I do — and to you — this very minute," exclaimed Diogenes, extending his arms towards him, like a child to its mother.

The old priest, still smiling, but weeping at the same time, threw himself into them, murmuring: —

"Eighty-six years! Eighty-six years — waiting for you."

Meanwhile the Marchioness of Villasis and the other

[1] Blessed be thy purity. — Tr.

father had left the room, and the latter related to the lady the old priest's history. Father Mateu had known Diogenes from his childhood, in the College of Noblemen, and hearing he was dying in Zumarraga asked permission of the Superior to go to his assistance; the latter refused, fearing lest at his extremely advanced age this work of charity might cost him his life; but the old man urged him with so much earnestness, and begged with so much anxiety, assuring him with such profound conviction that God had preserved him eighty-six years only for this, that the Superior could not do less than gratify him.

Through the closed door Diogenes' sobs could be heard from time to time, and again his cries of horror, inspired by the contemplation of himself, followed by tears of contrition, disconsolate and abundant, but sweet and free from bitterness, as is that of all grief supported by Faith and Hope. An hour elapsed, and finally a little bell was rung in the room. The Marchioness and the other Jesuit hastened to enter.

Father Mateu was seated at the head of the bed, exhausted and panting as if, in that short hour, he had lost the few remnants of strength he possessed, while two streams of tears, which lost themselves in his white beard, flowed from Diogenes' eyes. With a slight sign he called the Marchioness to his bedside and whispered to her with an expression of ineffable joy: —

"Father Mateu says that God has pardoned me."

And then in the same breath, with the profound contempt and Christian humility of the sinner who sees himself close to the grave, he added, in a whisper so low as to seem almost a moan, trying in vain to strike his breast: —

"Has pardoned me! me!"

The younger priest now arranged that Father Mateu should return to Loyola before nightfall, and that Don Federico should accompany him in the coach which was waiting. The two old men, both dying, separated without grief, like two friends on the threshold of a palace, who,

about to enter by different doors, shake hands and say, "Au revoir!" The young priest now proposed to bring the Holy Viaticum to the sick man, and the latter received the news, closing his eyes with profound humility, saying: —

"To me! To me!"

The father had no sooner left the room than Diogenes became very much agitated, groaning audibly and rolling his eyes about in a terrified manner. The Marchioness approached him; he had forgotten a very great sin; and before the lady had time to call the priest, he said to her with a great effort: —

"To amuse myself and to annoy Frasquito, I wrote him every day a letter calling him an idiot! I kept it up for four months. When Jacob returned from Italy he asked me to stop it; he said for a reason which interested him. Beg Frasquito's pardon for me, Maria. I am sorry, very sorry!"

The viaticum arrived, and the dying man received it with many tears, and a certain affectionate and humble awe which made him continually repeat: —

"To me! To me!"

He then asked for Extreme Unction, but when they told him he had already received it the evening before, he with great simplicity wished to receive it again.

"I was not conscious of it," he said. "Let me receive it again, so that I may go better prepared."

At seven o'clock he was still conscious, and suddenly cried out loudly, calling for Monina. The Marchioness had the child brought in, and placed her as before on the bed in front of him. The poor little creature clung affrighted to her grandmother's neck, and looked at the sick man with staring eyes, surprised and silent, without daring to cry. The dying man tried to raise his hand, but could not; he gazed at the child with unutterable tenderness, and making a painful effort said: —

"I taught you 'Bendita sea tu pureza.' Say it for me!"

The child's eyes filled with tears, and her little breast

began to quiver like that of a frightened bird: her grandmother whispered to her: —

"Say it, my child. You know it, darling, perfectly; say it."

The child clasped her little hands and began her prayer, Diogenes repeating it after her in a low voice, very slowly and with a certain august solemnity, which reminded one of the notes of an organ accompanying an angel's chant: —

"Bendita sea tu pureza,
Y Eternamente lo sea,
Pues todo un Dios se recrea
En tu graciosa belleza.
A tí, Celestial Princesa,
Virgen Sagrada Maria,
Yo te ofrezco en este dia,
Alma, vida y corazón.
Mirame, con compacion."

"Blessed be thy purity,
And it shall be, eternally,
For all Heaven rejoices
In thy gracious beauty,
To thee, Celestial Princess,
Blessed Virgin Mother,
I offer thee this day,
My soul, my life, my heart.
Have thou compassion on me."

Diogenes was here silent, and only Monina's trembling little voice was heard, which by a happy error, or an inspiration from Heaven, mistook the words in the last verse: —

"No le dejes, Madre mia."
"Do not forsake him, Mother mine."

Diogenes could no longer hear her; the death-rattle, with its agonizing gaspings, had begun, with intervals at times of more than a minute's duration. The child was carried away. The Marchioness and the priest knelt and began to pray for the repose of the soul. At a quarter of eleven, without

convulsions or apparent agony, and without losing his hold of the crucifix, he breathed his last.

The following morning, when the Jesuit returned to Loyola after the solemn requiem mass, which the Marchioness had celebrated in Zumarraga, he heard the church bells also tolling there. Father Mateu had died that same night, being found at dawn already cold, and extended on his bed. In his hands was the rosary, and his pure, childish smile still hovered about his lips. Upon his forehead, yellow as antique marble, a crown of white hairs realized the most wonderful type of moral beauty which man can conceive: Innocence with a white head.[1]

CHAPTER XI

Many grave events had happened from the time we lost sight of Jacob *en route* to Italy until we again find him upon the highway to Guipuzcoa driving the coach and six horses by Currita's side. The apparition of a strange phenomenon at the gates of Madrid was the first event, which caused the Marquis of Villamelon a fright greater than that experienced by Catilina at the gates of Rome, Mahomet II. at Constantinople, Isabella the Catholic at Granada, or William I. at the gates of Paris. It was the trichina!! Horrible and painful it was either to have to renounce with Israelitic severity the rosy and aromatic Extremadura hams, and Geneva sausages as variegated as mosaics, or run the risk of swallowing the diabolical microbe. The grief-stricken Fernandito followed it in his imagination through all its evolutions, seeing it lengthen out until converted into a tape-worm, or swell in bulk until, at the expense of the pith of his stomach, it changed into a boa-constrictor, identical

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with those he had once seen swallowing hens, rabbits, and even goats, as easily as he could swallow one after another whole little barrels of Sevillian olives. This occurred about eighteen days after Jacob's sudden departure, and between an afflicted spirit, rebellious stomach, and failing mind, Villamelon received an affectionate letter from this kind friend, in which, with most loving forethought and exquisite delicacy, he enclosed him an infallible prescription against the trichina, obtained from the Tramponetti brothers themselves, who were employed in the Geneva sausage factories. The prescription was quite simple. It was only necessary to dip the pork three times in ordinary boiling water, with the utensils, of course, in which it was to be cooked. Fernandito, believing himself to be in possession of a precious talisman, hastened to tell the good news to his beloved spouse Curra, and was ready to boil all the hams in his pantry, all the pans in his kitchen, with all the scullery boys and the cook in the bargain. And why not? Only a few days before he had read in a periodical that the Emperor of Burmah had commanded seven hundred persons to be buried alive, in order to appease the diabolical spirits who had disseminated the black smallpox throughout his dominions. And why should he not boil a cook and three scullery boys to ward off the trichina from his person and from the persons of his relatives and friends? Currita received the news with appalling indifference, and flatly refused to make use of the prescription with a certain sort of suppressed anger quite uncalled for under the circumstances. She also had received that day an affectionate letter from Jacob, likewise dated in Milan, vaguely telling her of great dangers and important business matters, and promising her, with the certainty of one sure of being warmly welcomed, the unutterable pleasure of his speedy return and a satisfactory explanation of his sudden departure.

"Excellent friend!" exclaimed Villamelon. "This very minute I shall write to thank him."

Currita, with an angry gesture, opened her lips as if about

to say something to him, but suddenly controlling herself, she said shortly, with her accustomed equanimity: —

"Very well, but send me the letter afterwards, that I may add a few lines; in this way I shall save myself writing him at length."

Half an hour later a servant handed her Fernandito's letter upon a silver salver, and the lady, after reading it, tore it into a thousand pieces, with gestures of rage. Two other letters from Jacob had been received at the Court that same day, one for the Marquis of Butron, long and explicit, full of lies and snares, which, without altogether deceiving the haughty diplomat, made him realize that, far from releasing the young Telemachus from his tutelage, he should need him more than ever, and must therefore continue initiating him into his political manœuvres. He had read in La Bruyère and appropriated to himself that sentence so common among politicians and non-politicians, whose distinctly ironical significance was completely lost upon him: "Even the greatest and best-intentioned ministers must have rogues within call; their use is a most delicate matter, and one must know how to manage them; there are occasions when they cannot be supplied by others. Honor, virtue, and conscience are always excellent qualities, but frequently useless. Of what use is an honest man at certain times?"

The other letter was for Uncle Frasquito, also long, and written with a great show of mystery, assuring him he had exorcized the danger by dint of cunning and money, and promising him the complete extirpation of the mysterious word "Idiot" as soon as he should return to Madrid and could communicate to the lodges the commands he had received in Italy. This letter he signed with an assumed name and put no date on it whatsoever, charging him with the injunction to burn it after reading, and to destroy the ashes. Uncle Frasquito did so in fear and trembling; and feeling he might now venture out, with certain precautions, he presented himself that night at Currita's house, in the group of charitable workers, coughing distressingly and offering to all the

ladies little pink caramels, the only remedy for the dreadful cough which his obstinate catarrh had left him.

Currita did not answer Jacob's letter; and the latter, surprised, again wrote to her, with the same result. The future minister now became alarmed and wrote to Butron, asking of him categorical explanations of this obstinate silence, which made him suspect some resentment on the lady's part, most dangerous and unpropitious under circumstances in which the intimate friendship and the full purse of the Villamelon consorts were absolutely indispensable to him.

In a studied tone and with paternal severity the wise Mentor then answered the young Telemachus, informing him of the present made by Mlle. de Sirop to the kermis, of Currita's just anger upon receiving this insult, which revealed the treason of the intimate friend upon whom she had conferred so many favors, and of the ferocity with which the social world had pounced upon the incident, commenting upon it and shaking their sides with laughter. The judicious Mentor concluded by saying with patronizing solicitude and paternal indulgence: —

"Your levity has been great; but invent some excuse, return quickly, and we will try to arrange matters."

Jacob did not wait for the advice to be repeated, and five days later the young Telemachus and the sage Mentor presented themselves in the boudoir; that is to say, landed on the shores of the island of Ogygia, the enchanted retreat of the invulnerable Calypso. The meeting must have been touching, but no nymph betrayed the goddess by revealing what was overheard or seen in the mysterious grotto, and to this day it is unknown by what means the three personages managed to arrive at that perfect understanding which from henceforth all Madrid observed between them. A few days later, however, the daily papers published the news that the Marquis of Sabadell had accused of robbery in the law courts a certain French adventuress, whose name was Mlle. de Sirop. It was circulated later on that the latter had disappeared, and finally whispered very *sotto voce* that the

Marquis himself, her public accuser, had her hidden in his own house. No one, however, could ever confirm this incomprehensible statement.

Things were then in the same state as they were a month before, and Jacob only observed in Currita, with profound contempt on his part, that strange anomaly in woman which consists in being servilely submissive to the man who oppresses her and ferociously tyrannical with the one who is subject to her, — a trait not noble, to say the least, and one which St. Ignatius Loyola applies to the devil himself in the following textual words from his celebrated book, *Exercises:* —

"The enemy is like a woman, weak by necessity and strong by circumstances."

As long as Jacob showed himself hard and despotic in his intimate relationship with the lady, imposing upon her in everything his will as law, she was always docile and submissive, ready to sacrifice herself for him and to render him all homage, with the humility of the heathen burning incense before an idol, who neither expects nor asks other recompense than to see it accepted. But when, under the circumstances already mentioned, Jacob was forced to humble himself before her, and to show himself submissive and conquered, Currita instantly changed her attitude, and without at all withholding her intimate confidence, or curtailing the constant and always lavish favors which she showered upon him, nevertheless made him feel her yoke, and gave him to understand that she was now absolute mistress, thus gratifying her vanity, — the first element which controlled all the actions of her life and all the sentiments of her heart, — by presenting him to the eyes of the world, conquered, subjected, and bound like a handsome king, prisoner to the wheels of her chariot.

On the other hand, no one could ever find out what Jacob had done in Italy. He took very good care not to tell, and with many diversified lies explained to every one the reasons for his absence, this new adventure being enveloped in the

vague mystery which, as the reader must already have remarked, always clung to the affairs and the person of this historical character. It was certain, however, that he had seen Garibaldi at Caprera and unfolded to him a wonderful tale, which completely explained the disappearance of the papers, — no one, of course, being held responsible. The old *farceur* shrugged his shoulders upon hearing him, not even remembering the documents, and deceived by Jacob's winning eloquence, cordially offered him recommendatory letters to the Venerables of Milan and of Spain, which would remove from him all further suspicion. Jacob accepted them most gladly, and believing the danger already past, gayly spent all his money in excursions through Italy, losing at roulette in Monaco all the money he had extorted from Uncle Frasquito, to the very last cent. The wise Mentor's news made him hasten his return to Spain, and becoming again absorbed in his every-day life of fashionable dissipation and aristocratic idleness, at times interrupted by important political periods, Garibaldi's letters were completely forgotten and the fright that had driven him to Italy became a thing of the past: he in his natural waywardness and want of foresight not again thinking of the Masons, and supposing himself likewise to be forgotten by them.

Meanwhile the Alfonsist labors were nearing an end, and Jacob, thinking he had dearly paid for the attainment of his ambition by the surrender of his papers, importuned Butron continually, and made himself conspicuous at all hours among the leading politicians of the day, in quest of a Cabinet portfolio, which had never really been promised him, but only held before his eyes as the possible price of his theft, in those times when the countersign had been to sweep within. But the hour had now come to sweep out, and the crafty Butron slyly raised the broom to give the young Telemachus the first lift, without being aware that another broom more powerful still had been raised at his own back for the same purpose.

The ministerial combinations were already forming, and in

the presence of Butron and Jacob a pretence was made of reserving for each of them the longed for portfolios; but the young Telemachus's back was no sooner turned than they told the prudent Mentor, who was the first to assent, that it was a risk and a discredit to the party to admit to the future Cabinet a crack-brained and reckless character like Sabadell, and that the portfolio which he expected must be given to Sr. Fernandez Gallego, an honest man and famous orator, capable of pulling a government out of the mire as easily as he might a cart, by only shouting energetically into the ears of the team.

Thus it was agreed; but Butron now had occasion to turn his back, and they then said that it was foolish and ridiculous to waste a portfolio upon this poor, effeminate nobleman, who at the most should be satisfied with a diplomatic appointment; that the portfolio which he expected should be given instead to Sr. Don Eusebio Diaz de la Laguna, who could make use of it if not with honor at least with profit, the latter being a conspicuous person in Amadeo's time, who, as always happens in all restorations, had gone bag and baggage to the Alfonsist side as soon as the dawn of triumph marked it, performing one of those feats which in the pharisaical jargon of public men are called "political changes," instead of villanies or infamies. His admission into the Cabinet would doubtless be a powerful lever for the tolerant and forgetful tendencies of the Restoration.

Pulido had gotten wind of all these rumors and hastened to notify his friend of them, fearing to forfeit the dazzling effulgence which the latter's Cabinet position would shed upon himself and friends. He therefore repaired one morning to Butron's house, nervous and out of humor, his index finger raised, and the inevitable words, "I told you so!" on the tip of his tongue. He glided behind the mysterious screen which formed a redoubt in the room for the diplomat's secrets, and found the latter plunged in profound meditation before some papers which evidently contained important state secrets, and from which he only raised his

eyes a moment to glance at the new-comer, murmuring in an absent-minded way: —

"Ah! Pulido!"

But Pulido, pointing the inexorable finger, as if its knuckles were elastic, and shaking it up and down with the fatal oscillation of a pendulum in motion, exclaimed in a tremulous accent: —

"You see, Pepe! You see! I told you so!"

"What?" replied Butron, with the resigned air of one who prepares to receive a disagreeable shock.

"What?" repeated Pulido, in the same tone. "Nothing; only they are going to deprive you of the portfolio, Pepe."

And still shaking his finger, he imparted to the diplomat his alarming news. Butron was not in the least affected. Was he altogether an idiot? He was well up in all these manœuvres, but he held his tongue, and winked at them, for he had the assurance — and his vanity in fact gave it to him — that the future Cabinet could not do without him and his services. As for Sabadell, that was another matter; he had formed absurd illusions which, in the future order of things, it was impossible to realize. Sabadell was crazy, and an imbecile, who had lent some fraudulent services to the party, but who was not made of the stuff which the Restoration required for its ministers. They might do without a Prim, or a Serrano, but never without a Canovas de Castillo or a Butron. The diplomat stopped here with a solemn pause, and added sententiously: —

"Every tree is of wood, but the pine is not oak, and in my opinion Sabadell can no more be a minister than I can help being one."

Pulido's finger shook so rapidly as almost to run the risk of becoming disjointed, its oscillations revealing its owner's impatience.

"And do you think, Pepe, that Canovas del Castillo is of the same opinion?"

The diplomat looked at him with an air of pity and finally said: —

"Listen, Pulido, my son. Believe me, I am not altogether an imbecile. Canovas does not dare take a step without first consulting me."

"Did he consult you about proposing Sr. Diaz de la Laguna for the candidature?"

The great Robinson was stupefied, for he was completely ignorant that such a candidature had been presented; but it seeming to him beneath his dignity to confess ignorance, and yielding to his pride, which helped him to disguise everything with solemn lies and enigmatical opinions, in order to preserve his political reputation, he replied imperturbably:

"He did."

"Well, what then?"

"Then I can assure you that Laguna will not be appointed." And giving a sound slap with his Esau-like hand upon the papers strewn before him, he said solemnly, with a certain air of dignified reserve, which gave Pulido to understand that behind the screen of the redoubt was the screen of the diplomat's eyebrows, guarding within his brow mysterious secrets which he was not permitted to investigate: —

"See here, Pulido, let us change the subject. My own secrets I can confide when I choose, but the secrets of others, never! For your peace of mind, however, and the regulation of your conduct, I will tell you two things. First, that Antonio Canovas was conferring with me last night, in that same chair in which you are seated, until four o'clock in the morning." The worthy Butron half rose from his seat, in order to give Pulido time to swallow the tremendous lie, and continued saying: —

"Secondly, Canovas, upon taking his leave, confided to me this project of a secret treaty with Germany," — and he struck the papers he had before him, — "and I must have time and solitude in which to study them."

Pulido felt very small before the bull-dog profile of Bismarck, which the diplomat's words evoked before him, and recalling to mind that the eleventh commandment of

God was not to meddle, he took his leave, with his finger very limp, timid, and expectant, but not before casting a furtive glance at the project of secret treaty with Germany, which the diplomat's extended hand seemed to shield from all prying eyes. Somewhat of a suspicious nature, however, the idea occurred to him that this project of secret contract was not exactly with the German government, but with the depositary of Llardy, a celebrated gastronomic power, of the St. Jeronimo race-course; for between the diplomat's hairy fingers could be seen the vignette of the renowned Emilio's bills.

Pulido was not the man, once on the track of a secret, to retreat before any danger or difficulty; he went, therefore, straight to Llardy's and asked if the Marquis of Butron had on their books any unpaid bills. Emilio, doubtless thinking that the gentleman had come to settle up, told him there were four unpaid accounts, the last of which was for the *buffet* of a ball, given three years before in honor of the Countess of Albornoz, and that the day before, for the hundredth time, he had remitted them all together without as yet having received payment for any. Pulido's finger erected itself with the strength of a caterpillar; Emilio, amazed, heard him say twice: —

"I knew it; I knew it."

CHAPTER XII

At last the twenty-ninth of December of 1874 dawned, and at five minutes before noon of the same day the Minister of War, Serrano Bedoya, sprang violently out of bed, as he was likewise to spring twenty-four hours later from his ministerial chair. A telegram from the military governor of Sagunto informed him that General Martinez Campos had proclaimed Prince Alfonso King of Spain, in the Ventas of Puzol, at the head of the Daban brigade. The government

took alarm, and at once convened an extraordinary session at the War Department, arresting as a preliminary measure Canovas del Castillo and many other noted personages, among whom were Don José Pulido, the young Telemachus, and the worthy Mentor. They were temporarily locked up in the Saladero, the amiable intention of their jailers being to send them on a voyage for their health to the Philippine Islands, as soon as the chimerical proclamation should be annulled. Through the courtesy of the Governor of Madrid, Señor Moreno Benitez, they were assigned better lodgings a few hours later, in the Civil Government House. But either through the perfidious intrigue of friends, or the cruel fury of their enemies, it is a fact that the three comrades, Jacob, Butron, and Pulido, remained shut up in the Saladero the whole day of the twenty-ninth until daybreak the following morning, when the door of their prison was opened only to close before their eyes the door of their hopes.

At a quarter past nine that same night, — the revolutionary government now forever ruined, — the Captain-General of Madrid, Don Fernando Primo de Rivera, was invested with full power, and at once had the Alfonsist prisoners at the Civil Government House set at liberty. A Regent Ministry was hastily formed, of which Señor Gallego and Señor Laguna formed part, the young Telemachus and the worthy Mentor, of course, being excluded.[1]

[1] The members of this first Alfonsist Cabinet under the Presidency of Don Antonio Canovas del Castillo, were Messrs. Castro, Cardenas, Jovellar, Salaverria, Marquis of Molius, Romero Robledo, Ayala, and the Marquis of Orovio. It seems useless for us to observe that upon our supposing a Señor Gallego and a Señor Laguna as forming part of this Cabinet, we do not, of course, allude to any of the gentlemen who in reality composed it. And while we are on the subject of allusions, it may be well to state once more, that those persons are completely mistaken who have thought to see in any of the characters of the present novel descriptions of actual personages, who doubtless were very little known by those who judge them, if they find resemblances between them. Our personages are not photographs of real individuals, but types of social characters; and if an artist's vanity can be flattered, that his creations are so realistic they cannot be conceived

The latter was completely annihilated; Jacob was furious, and Pulido, without strength enough to raise his finger, or breath enough to murmur "I told you so," was as dumb as Cassandra at the sight of Troy destroyed, and Greece triumphant. Butron snorted, Pulido groaned, and Jacob spat forth abuses, and between energetic harangues, bitter reproaches, violent recriminations, and plans of a campaign to destroy this government which had swindled them, several days elapsed, until the Regent Ministry, somewhat relieved by the arrival of the young monarch, was at last able to unlock its storehouse, and raising on high its bunch of nutritive dates, which has replaced the olive branch, ancient symbol of peace, began to distribute positions, honors, and destinies among its different allies, Butron receiving a diplomatic post of the highest order.

The latter sustained an internal conflict between prudence on the one hand and the exactions of his dignity on the other; but doubtless bearing in mind that beggars must not be choosers, that when we cannot have what we want we must take what we can get, and that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, he at last departed, resigned and majestic, to represent the person of Alfonso XII. in a foreign land. A second-rate post was also given to Señor Pulido, and Jacob was offered a diplomatic position equal to that accepted by Butron. But the young Telemachus was a man capable in his wrath of understanding and putting into practice that vengeance of the Chinese, who hang themselves at their enemy's door, in order to call down upon him divine wrath and the hatred of his fellow-men. Full of rage, he rejected the offer with scorn, and imagining he could attain by his own efforts that which his rank had denied him, he again became affiliated with his old friends the revolutionists, who had not as yet gone over to the other side, and whose leader at the moment was his Excellency Martinez. They prom-

without a living model, the delicacy, and still more the conscience, of an honorable writer, should scorn the idea of converting by this means a book written with high moral aims into a deliberate libel.

ised to form a formidable opposition party the day the reign of Alfonso XII. should be recognized. Jacob was welcomed by them as a Hercules descended from heaven, to undertake again at their side his twelve labors upon the earth; and at the moment we find him returning from Biarritz by Currita's side he had already gained, with the help of this faithful friend, a senatorial life position, from which high tribunal he proposed to scale by Martinez's side the ministerial Olympus, once the dreaded and eagerly looked for move was effected, which the cunning Apis ox was preparing with great secrecy.

Madrid soon began to assume its gay winter aspect, and two transcendental events engaged the attention of politicians and the fashionable world: the opening of Congress, and the monarch's marriage. The first promised unrivalled parliamentary campaigns, the second opened up vistas of diversions and merry-makings never before enjoyed, and both were discussed and even initiated in Currita's salons, the centre of reunion at that time for the most conspicuous politicians of the future dynastic opposition, as well as for the most *gommeux* and the most *poisseux* of high Madrid society. Her Friday *après-dîners* soon became famous, and a Cabinet was concerted at them, with the same facility that a marriage was disconcerted, a delegate was gained for the opposition, or a girl was lost forever, ruined under the lady's guardian protection, by that gallantry of some salons which a not easily frightened author calls "trabajo de zapa que el vicio emplea para minar la virtud." [1]

Pedro Lopez, in the *Fleur-de-lis*, compared Currita's salon with those famous assemblies which began in the Hôtel Rambouillet and finished with Mmes. de Staël, Récamier, Tallien, and Girardin. It is quite certain that if in the former were not to be found, as in the latter, the culture, agreeable conversation, and exquisite courtesy of those past times, which to-day have come to be between men and women

[1] The work of the spade which vice uses to undermine virtue. — Tr.

exclusive attributes of powdered wigs and lace frills, at least that moral dissolving principle was not lacking which consists in tolerating and authorizing scandal. Now was seen more plainly than ever the deadly influence which is exercised upon a whole social community by one of those queens of fashion, who begin by wearing very low gowns, and finish by adopting very low customs, and who, by imposing the yoke of their elegant extravagances, conclude by imposing that of their shameless vices, familiarizing even virtuous persons with scandal, by making it tolerable and in good form. The latter learn to regard without wonder, without a blush or a protest, spectacles such as Currita offered, doing the honors of her house with most elegant distinction by the Marquis of Sabadell's side, whilst her children lay forgotten. Villamelon, already a hopeless victim of softening of the brain, played *besigue* or *tresillo* with the celebrities of the moment, or tried the patience of his guests, confined as in a vicious circle by his ordinary topics of conversation, the terro-naval combat of Black Cape, the marvels of his cook's art, the advances in photography, the advantages of the artificial incubation of hen's-eggs, or the strange constitutions of Doctor Tanner, or Succi the Italian, who, to his great amazement, seemed to have solved the problem, to him horrible and incomprehensible, of living without eating.

A new scandal, planned in Currita's house, and carried into effect under her very nose, perhaps also with her consent, only proved to sensible people how dangerous is the proximity of vice; for even though not contaminated by it, one breathes at least in its atmosphere a certain poison which confuses and misleads, and causes one to slip and fall in the end. Margarita Belluga, one of the young girls who, upon making her first appearance in the social world, had principally attracted attention by her candor and innocence, suddenly disappeared one day from her parents' house, to reappear again shortly afterwards in Italy, *magna parens artium*, and mysterious refuge of the scum of crea-

tion. She had eloped with Celestino Reguera, Currita's accomplice in her artistic attempts, whom the lady had always retained by her side in order to lend a lustre to her court by the brilliancy of his genius, in the same manner that Philip maintained Aristotle; Augustus, Virgil; Charles V., Carsilaso; and Louis XIV., Molière.

There now ensued weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, surprised comments and speculations; nor were these lamentations merely the noise of one wave breaking upon the shore, for they swelled into a roar and became formidable, like the boisterous sea lashing the coast. But in spite of the fact that everybody clearly saw which way the wind blew which had loosened this tempest, nevertheless only two of the many honorable mothers who flocked to Currita's entertainments ceased to take their daughters there, and only one of the many proper husbands who frequented them withdrew his wife from this pernicious house, to which it had become a necessity to go, because — because pleasant hours were passed there; the lady regulated in her salons the laws of good form, and to be admitted to her house was a *brevet* of elegance and notoriety.

But one day a stupendous piece of news flew through Madrid, which at first was regarded as an absurdity invented by some idler of the Veloz Club; later on its likelihood was conceded, as it might have been that Sagasta would say mass, or that the Grand Turk had become a St. Bernard monk, and it was finally propagated as a fact, unlikely but certain, absurd but true, from the salons to the ante Salas and from the halls of Congress to the lobbies of the theatres, filling all the elegant world with surprise, wonder, and curiosity. The ever exalted imagination of the Madrid people embellished the fact with interpretations and comments. Some saw in it a political manœuvre, others a feminine piece of rivalry; several thought it a sign of reconciliation between the devout and the profane world, and various of those supposed to be best informed and most capable of adjusting their neighbors' affairs saw on the

"Well, don't let the pile of Judas fall to your lot."

"Ah! no, indeed! I shall be faithful to Curra."

"Why have the others deserted?"

"I can see I don't know. There has been a clash of *prohemes*, nothing more; and Maria Villasis's has triumphed."

"I suppose because it is more delicate."

"Just! Little pan-biscuits and heavenly bacon. I prefer Curra's: it is more substantial."

"What is?"

"The *pahella*."[1] And the aunt and nephew began to laugh so heartily that they came very near choking on the consommé in reserve, served to a magnificent silver service, with which the fashionable guests were beginning to appease their respective appetites. Under these auspicious circumstances the dinner began, slow and listless. Villamelon, with lordly gravity and solemn aspect, retired within himself, without concerning himself about the German ambassadress on his right, or the Duchess of Peru on his left: at every moment he consulted the menu printed in brilliant colors upon fine vellum, in the style of the ancient missals of the middle ages, and not satisfied with this, asked again and again in profound accents of the man who waited upon him: —

"Have I been served to everything?"

Directly opposite was Curra, the German ambassador at her right, and Don Juan Manuel — Apis ex, in other words — at her left, who, forgetting all grudges with praiseworthy magnanimity, was at the moment on most intimate terms with the lady, substituting the worthy Barron in his post of Minister to the young Talleyrandos. Curra showered delicate attentions upon him, and at times spoke to him in a low voice, with signs of most intimate confidence. In one of these rather she pointed out to him mysteriously, with a rapid gesture, a small object upon the table. Among the thousand and one trifles and knick-knacks which adorned it were small bottles of violets before each gentleman's plate.

[1] "Pahella" — a promiscuous mixture of meat and vegetables boiled together. — Tr.

placed in diminutive crystal glasses, light and diaphanous as petrified air, and each having in the centre a small *fleur-de-lis*, an exquisite natural wonder, raised with great care in Currita's hot-houses. With a significant smile she showed the Apis ox the bouquet before him, and the latter, also smiling, muttered between his teeth, without any protest from the lady: —

"Women are the devil."

Between these two principal groups which filled the two ends of the table, the rest of the guests were distributed: Lopez Moreno's wife, who at the time was increasing her immense fortune by making loans at twenty per cent; the Marchioness of Valdivieso, who no longer invoked Paco Velez's name to bear witness to her remarks, but called upon one Fermin Doblado instead; the Countess of Balsano, divorced from her husband and engaged in a lawsuit with her children; the Duke of Bringas, denounced in court by his wife as a spendthrift; Don Casimiro Pantojas, ever on the lookout for the *paulo post futurum* of some Greek verb; and two new deputies, innocent provincials as yet, whom the Countess of Albornoz, in league with Martinez, had lured to her banquets that she might secure them for the future opposition; the æsthetic Pedro Lopez, who paid for his cover every Friday by several columns of gelatine prose in the *Fleur-de-lis;* and the Marquis of Sabadell, who completed the number. The latter, upon perceiving the seven gaps in the number of invited guests, cast impatient glances at Currita, which produced upon the smouldering anger of the latter the effect which the wind causes upon fire, and apparently revealed in both the annoyance of seeing partly frustrated some plan which they had concerted.

Currita's chagrin in fact equalled her uneasiness, for her fugitive guests were indeed those who belonged to the healthy and virtuous part of Madrid society, whom she delighted in attracting to her house that she might silence by their example the scruples of others, just as in certain houses of prohibited industries, the sample of some other

innocent industry is exhibited upon the door-post, in order to deceive the police and serve as a bait for the unwary. Accordingly that night were absent the Duke and Duchess of Astorga, who were held in great esteem by the new monarch and had been chosen by him to form part of the young Queen's Court attendants; the Count and Countess of Orduña, noble figures of the old Carlist party, ever faithful in misfortune; and the Marchioness of Lebrija, whose eagerness to succor and preside over pious associations had justly gained for her the double reputation of being charitable and vain. Uncle Frasquito was also missing, who, to Currita's great indignation, had not even taken the trouble to send regrets for his non-attendance; and Leopoldina Pastor, also absent, had only excused herself by a laconic little note, saying that a "good-for-nothing" sty had appeared on her eye, putting her horribly out of humor. The absence of these two last wounded Currita's self-love more than any of the others, because both were like those birds who fly in time from the tree which is losing its foliage, to wing their flight to that which is beginning to blossom.

All this frightened Currita, as it seemed to her undoubtedly a prearranged plan; and while she endeavored to sustain and animate the flagging conversation of her guests, she at the same time listened attentively to what was going on outside the dining-room. Ordinarily on Fridays, even before the dinner was over, large numbers of guests already filled the drawing-rooms, taking possession of the tresillo and billiard tables, and forming gay and animated groups and circles, which continued until the small hours of the morning. Nothing could she hear upon this particular evening, and with increased uneasiness Currita endeavored to draw out the dinner by exhausting all the resources of her genius, inserting between each cover little tales equivalent to the most piquant sauces, in order to give time for the guests to arrive, and so avoid the bad impression of finding the drawing-rooms empty. It was however impossible to continue longer the thankless task, and the dinner was at last brought

to a close by a mysterious scene, followed by a cleverly arranged theatrical coup.

Her diminutive foot lightly touched the hoof of the Apis ox under the table, and they both exchanged with Jacob a rapid glance of intelligence, which seemed to signify: "On guard!" Then Currita, taking the bouquet in front of Martinez, arranged it herself with exquisite coquetry in his button-hole, repeating the customary words of the Parisian flower girl, "Monsieur! Fleurissez votre boutonnière."

Jacob with perfectly assumed joviality stopped her in the act, by calling out from his place: —

"Look out, Martinez; be careful. She is playing a trick on you."

"A trick?" exclaimed Currita, quickly holding back the boutonnière.

"Yes, a trick," affirmed Jacob, laughing. "Don't you see, man, the bouquet contains a *fleur-de-lis?*"

"Ah!" replied Currita, offended, "I must protest indeed! I persuade whom I can, but take no one by surprise. Do you wish the bouquet, Martinez? Yes, or no."

"Ju, Ju, Ju!" growled the Apis ox, with an affirmative nod.

"You accept it, then?" asked Currita.

"I do."

"With all its consequences?"

"With all its consequences," repeated the Apis ox.

And he glanced at those present with a proud, almost fierce look, which did not lack the Tuscan nobleness of a Mario, plebeian but formidable, who permitted himself to be caressed by feminine patricians. General applause greeted the declaration of the old revolutionist, and Villamelon, much moved, proposed a toast in honor of King Alfonso XII. The glasses were drained to the dregs, and Fernandito, taking the one which Martinez had used, said solemnly: —

"This glass in future years will have great historic value. Understand, Martinez? Allow me to keep it. I wish to bequeath it to my children." And tightly grasping his

historical souvenir, he offered his arm to the German Ambassadress to escort her to the little blue parlor, where it was customary to serve the coffee in those gala days. Here Currita's triumphs came to an end. The room was deserted, and through its open doors could be seen the yellow room on the left and the grand ball-room on the right, thrown open and illuminated only on Fridays; both were deserted. In the first could be dimly seen, in a secluded corner, four very grave and stiff-necked gentlemen playing tresillo; in the second only the lights were reflected in the polished parquet of fine waxed woods, and in the colossal mirrors, giving to the whole place, in the midst of its magnificence, the fantastic and fearful aspect of those enchanted palaces described in fairy tales. The fiasco was complete, and Currita, stupefied, glanced instinctively at the clock of gilded bronze, on a mantelpiece near-by. It was already half-past ten.

She now saw, back of her in the same little blue room, a very smart and elegant lady asleep in an arm-chair. In her hand she held a fashion plate, which had fallen negligently in her lap, while the feeble light of a large lamp, placed upon a tripod and screened by a shade of soft-tinted silk, shone full in her face. It was Izabel Mazacan, the perfidious Izabel, who had made up with Currita two months before, and was disposed to quarrel again whenever the time and occasion should present itself. None could be so propitious as the present, and pretending to be asleep in this solitude, she gradually opened her eyes with such a comic expression of fright, and such a funny start, that all present laughed.

"Great heavens, dear! forgive me; but upon seeing myself alone I fell asleep." The joke appeared to Currita in extremely bad taste and she answered sharply: —

"How delicious! You were doubtless dreaming of the angels?"

"Something like that; yes, for I was dreaming of you."

Currita took good care not to ask for the interpretation of the dream, but the Marchioness of Valdivieso, with her usual want of tact, said gayly: —

"What a coincidence! Why not tell us the dream?"

"Oh! it was nothing; only I thought Curra, poor dear, had also gone to Maria Villasis's house." And the sly Countess pronounced the "poor dear" with such an air of pity and such a jesting accent, that the commiserated one turned upon her furiously, saying with her innocent little laugh: —

"Well, my dear, neither sleeping nor waking would I ever have accused you of such a thing."

"Why not?"

"Well, for two reasons; the second, because you would not go."

"And the first, because Maria Villasis would not have me," said the Countess of Mazacan, bursting into a laugh, with all her insolence.

"Exactly so," replied Currita. "Because Leonore rejects me, I reject Leonore; as Mr. Simpleton Booby Idiot and Dumbhead would say."

The Countess of Mazacan was about to retort, but at this moment Carmen Tagle, Paco Velez, and Gorito Sardona came in, all very compunctious, saying they had just come from the opera, but that the theatre was deserted. They immediately thought, of course, that *Monsieur tout le monde* must be at Currita's, it being Friday, but discovered afterwards that the grand *complet* that night was — who would have thought it? — at the Marchioness of Villasis's house. They had come therefore full of indignation to protest, and to bid poor Curra good-night, for it did not seem decent for them to retire that night without doing so.

Poor Curra escaped the best way she could from these demonstrations of compassion which attacked her nerves, and directed her steps very hurriedly to the billiard room, where Jacob, the two deputies, and Martinez were conferring alone. They all congratulated the lady upon her clever arrangement and representation of the bouquet comedy, which would obtain widespread fame! The following day the *Fleur-de-lis* would publish an account of it, in this way

preparing the ground for the solemn declaration which very shortly Martinez proposed to make in the Senate. But the latter, before taking this last step, deemed it best first to sound them at the Palace on the subject.

Currita immediately offered her services. She had been maid of honor since the time of Isabella II., and at the monarch's marriage two months before, the new Queen had also been compelled to send her the Maid of Honor Cross. Martinez shook his large head. This was not exactly what he wanted, because the one upon whom he had cast his eye, and who as his herald should precede him to the Palace, was Jacob; the latter, as a grandee of Spain, could —

The widow of Baron Platavieja here interrupted him by entering the room, followed by her six daughters, amiable girls, who, in union with their mother, formed in quantity and quality the sum total of the seven capital sins, the name by which they were known at Court. Mother and daughters had also hastened, full of indignation, to protest before poor Curra; and the Baroness affirmed, *coram populo*, that what the Marchioness of Villasis had done that night was nothing more or less than a crying shame.

"A downright shame," echoed the amiable Misses Platavieja, all immediately surrounding, like a swarm of butterflies, the two young and unmarried deputies, with the idea doubtless of alighting on one of them. It was impossible to continue the conversation longer before these witnesses, and the evening passed slowly and wearily without other incidents. Maria Valdivieso, who was not on particularly good terms with her cousin, took especial pains to yawn with seeming unconsciousness every time the latter glanced her way. The German ambassadress sang, with a deplorable lack of grace, a ballad which the Duchess qualified as having been barked; and at a quarter past twelve, when Pedro Lopez, after taking tea and storing away in his pockets a provision of sandwiches sufficient to last a week, now began to make the list for the chronicle of drawing-rooms, which the *Fleur-de-lis* published every Saturday,

his astonished eyes could only count beneath this arched roof the small number of fourteen ladies. Seven belonged to the family of the capital sins, and the other seven divided among themselves the enemies of the soul, — "the world, the flesh, and the devil."

The Marchioness of Villasis scored a brilliant triumph, and the one hundred and twenty honorable women who assembled that night and every Friday at her house, only proved to the pessimists what she herself had said, at a not far distant period: —

"Madrid is not a cesspool."

It is indeed true that the "something rotten in the State of Denmark" disseminates its bad odor in all directions, just as the emanations from a fetid pool affect the whole of a beautiful meadow by staining the healthful vegetation with the sickly hues of an invalid.

But this something rotten, this fetid pool, ever overflowing by its own rankness and the cowardice of others, mixing with the pure waters and communicating to them in appearance its impurities, had now itself stagnated in the Countess of Albornoz's house; and the meadows once cleared, the logic of numbers put its inexorable hands *dessus du panier* of the great world and drew out only fourteen disreputable to one hundred and twenty honorable women. A grumbling newspaper, however, made another distinct subdivision of the women of that day: —

"A great many good ones.

"A few bad ones.

"Many, who, being in reality good, were to all appearances the contrary."

CHAPTER XIII

The news came with a shock, and although many tried to deny it, in face of the very evidence itself, their negatives were stranded against an official, legitimate, and authentic document, which had circulated the day before through all the houses of the nobility. It was an action of the royal administration of his Majesty the King, in which the chief majordomo of the Palace said to all the grandees of Spain: "His Excellency his Majesty King Alfonso XII. — God save him! — has been pleased to appoint the hour of two in the afternoon of the seventh of February, for the ceremony of conferring the hat in his Royal presence upon the following grandees of Spain," etc., etc. Among those names marked on the margin, by the rigorous order of written antiquity, all of them recalling grandeur of character, firmness of virtue, nobility of thought, and heroic deeds, in which Spanish history abounds, was written in full, and the second on the list, the name of his Excellency Señor Don Jacob Ponce Malgarejo, Marquis of Sabadell. The case was curious, and those accustomed to leave no stone unturned in investigating the whys and wherefores of their neighbors' actions, clever connoisseurs in the subtle art of putting one and two together, and in scrutinizing the simplest events in their neighbors' lives, immediately discovered subterranean connections between the action of the chief majordomo and the column which the *Fleur-de-lis* had published several days before. According to the latter, it was whispered that a certain personage of great importance, for some time retired from political life, would again return to the arena of combat, followed by numerous partisans, and holding aloft in his mighty hand, with honorable independence, the flag of Alfonso XII. An angelical lady, well known in high social circles for her genius, elegance, and beauty, had wrested from him at a banquet an explicit,

although not public confession, of his new dynastic sympathies. A bunch of violets had been the incidental cause, and an angel was the instrument. Happy the athlete who enters the new arena under such poetic auspices!

The article revealed the caddish pen of Pedro Lopez, and the rest of the charade was easily deciphered, with only one slight doubt. Martinez of course was the athlete, but how in the name of Heaven could Currita be the angel? Some one, however, solved the enigma: —

"Very easily. Lucifer was also an angel."

All were now convinced; and murmuring tongues, taking upon themselves the office of public instruction, began to analyze the fact with keenest interest. Almost immediately everybody became aware of a peculiar circumstance, so to express it, of a purely domestic character. Jacob was only a Marquis consort, and his rights to the nobility came to him exclusively through his wife, from whom he had been separated for nearly twelve years. The point was discussed; and it was unanimously agreed, that to make use of this right was on Jacob's part nothing less than an outrage. This decided, the next thing to be considered was the diplomatic manœuvre, which apparently united the charade of the *Fleur-de-lis* with the action of the chief majordomo of the Palace. After the Restoration Jacob had joined the Revolutionists commanded by Martinez, who so far had only acknowledged the new monarch at a private banquet, and under cover of a bunch of violets, presented by an angel not inscribed in the celestial hierarchy. The fact of the Marquis consort presenting himself at the Palace clearly showed that his chief, the Apis ox, had taken another step forward, by sending a faithful explorer to the fertile land of Mesopotamia. This was evident, and it was now agreed that the act, without ceasing to be an outrage, was at the same time a political manœuvre, which, according to the opinion of competent judges, would unite and join hands in amiable intercourse, just as had already been done by the athlete, the angel, and the bunch of violets.

A third problem now arose, as a legitimate consequence of the first and irremediable sequel of the second. Who would be the hero's sponsor at Court? Who would have sufficient courage to countenance such an outrage, and run the risk of a future political onslaught. It was a traditional custom among the grandees upon whom the hat was to be conferred, to invite as their sponsors for the ceremony those other grandees who had already received the hat, and who, near or far, were the heads of their families. The old Duke of Ordaz, the prototype of honor and nobility, was the head of the family of Sabadell; and it was now discovered, after careful investigation, that Jacob had had the presumption to invite him to act as his sponsor, and that the noble old gentleman had declined his request. The unknown sponsor thus remained enveloped in mystery, and became the subject of fruitless conjecture, until a short lithographic note, two days later, solved the enigma. Those most interested clapped their hands: —

"Albricias, albricias!
Padrino tenemos."

"Eureka! Eureka!
The sponsor is found!"

In the note was written: "The Marquis of Villamelon and of Paracuellar, Count of Albornoz and of Caltanazor, begs your Excellency to assist at the ceremony of conferring the hat upon his Excellency Señor Don Jacob Tellez Ponce Malgarejo, Marquis of Sabadell, grandee of Spain, for whom he acts as sponsor, and for which ceremony his Majesty has appointed the seventh of February, 1878, at two o'clock in the afternoon, in his Majesty's royal chamber." The result exceeded all expectation, and the situation assumed, *nemine discrepante*, a third feature. Doubtless it was an outrage, certainly it was a political manœuvre, and without fail it would end in a merry farce.

The day dawned cloudy, with a cold, biting wind, while huge flakes of snow began to fall early in the afternoon, like

a heavy shower of jasmines. A large landau dashed like a flash past the royal theatre, described a rapid semicircle around the Plaza de Oriente, and stopped suddenly in front of the Palace at the main entrance, with one of those masterly halts which only Tom Sickles' powerful hand could effect, without alarming his horses. His ruddy face gleamed from the top of the box-seat, half buried in an enormous fur collar, while his square head was bared when Fritz, jumping from his seat as if impelled by a spring, opened the carriage door as inflexible, ready, and expert, as a bona-fide, elegant, and correct groom should be. A three-cornered hat with white, curly plumes now showed itself at the carriage door; then a patent leather shoe with gold buckle, and finally a rounded leg in knee breeches and white silk stockings, while from within the carriage resounded a formidable *Brerrr!* vehement and shuddering, like the cry of one who suddenly plunges into an ice-cold bath. Joined to these extremities was a magnificent mantle of marten fur, which enveloped the Marquis of Villamelon, arrayed in full uniform. There was a slight pause, during which Fernandito tapped impatiently on the pavement, saying nervously, "Make haste."

The bulky head of the Apis ox next appeared, and shortly afterwards Martinez in person stood by Villamelon's side, enveloped in his long cloak and tightly grasping his inseparable cane. A small gloved hand now placed itself in Villamelon's, and the elegant figure of the Marchioness of Valdivieso sprang to the ground. Another pause and more stamps from Fernandito, who again called out: "Make haste." Then very slowly the Countess of Albornoz poked her little red head, adorned with a tiny black bonnet, out of the window, and glanced rapidly at the numerous carriages standing on either side of the Palace entrance. She finally got slowly out, glancing about her and saying, much disgusted: —

"So he has not come yet?"

"He has no idea whatsoever of formality," replied Villamelon, irritably. "I'll wager anything he arrives late."

And at this moment, the Palace clock, as if wishing to increase his uneasiness, struck the quarter before two. Villamelon offered his arm to the Marchioness of Valdivieso, to escort her up the grand staircase, and Currita followed, leaning upon the arm of the Apis ox. Going up at the same time, on the other side of the balustrade which divided the stairway, was a stout old gentleman with a short white beard, conversing excitedly with another very thin old man, who was most elaborately arrayed. The former was plainly dressed in the tightly buttoned up coat and unpretentious uniform of a lieutenant-general, with its gala accessories. Upon catching sight of them, Currita quickly pressed the arm of the Apis ox, saying in a very low voice: —

"Look, Martinez! There goes Gallego, the Minister of Grace and Justice. If he sees you, he will instantly become alarmed. There! he is looking this way. How delicious! No doubt but the crisis will be declared to-night in the Cabinet."

The presence of the Apis ox in fact produced a visible impression upon the stout old man pointed out by Currita as the Minister of Grace and Justice. He stopped a moment surprised, called the attention of his companion to them, and both held a brief dialogue; he, as if mystified and uncertain, and the other as if amazed at his surprise.

Things were beginning to shape themselves. Since the fall of Amadeo, Martinez had never set foot in the Palace, and his presence there at this moment, although it might be only as a spectator, lent to Jacob's action a public sanction, which increased its importance. Martinez, looking askance at the Minister, expressed a desire to make his acquaintance. Currita did not allow him to finish: —

"Nothing is easier. This very moment I will present you. You shall see." And acknowledging with a graceful bow the profound salute of the two old men, who were already now at the head of the stairs, she called out quickly: —

"Gallego! one moment! I wish to ask you a favor! I should like so much a simple little cross, some souvenir of

Isabella II., or Charles III. One of the sons of my attorney at Granada is to be married, and I wish to present him with this little gift. He is somewhat vain and likes to wear trinkets. I will send you a little note to remind you. Eh, Gallego?" And suddenly, as if it had just occurred to her, she added: —

"Ah! I beg your pardon. Do you not know Martinez? Martinez, allow me to present Señor Fernandez Gallego, Minister of Grace and Justice, — my good friend Don Juan Antonio Martinez."

Both personages saluted each other with great courtesy, and Currita, with the airs of an Ursine Princess, common to women who play with politicians in public like puppets, walked between the two towards the door of the Saleta. Here they found Villamelon, who, nervous, frightened, and impatient, could not take his eyes off the staircase entrance.

"Curra, for Heaven's sake, you stop at every step. Has Jacob come? Well, he will certainly arrive late. Go find a good place, and take Martinez with you. Understand me, Curra? With that indifferent spirit you will neither hear Jacob nor see me either. Go! The Palace clock has already struck two! It will all be up with me, and I shall be left in the lurch, indeed, if he arrives late now." And, late and hurried, Jacob did arrive at this moment, coming towards them from the end of the gallery, his white Santiago cape, which covered his picturesque uniform as a Maestrante of Seville, gracefully flung across his shoulder. Villamelon did not give him time to breathe; he barely had a moment to exchange an affectionate smile with the lady, and a pressure of the hand with Martinez, when the impatient sponsor, pulling him by the cape, disappeared with him through the door of the Saleta. Here were assembled the grandees upon whom the hat was to be conferred, and those who were to act as their sponsors, forming a brilliant conjunction of gay and many-colored uniforms, among which a few dress-coats of severe and irreproachable cut were conspicuous.

Meanwhile in the King's antechamber the preliminaries for the aristocratic ceremony had begun, which was instituted by the Emperor Charles V. when the privilege of keeping on their hats in the King's presence, formerly common to all titles, was limited by him to only twelve grandees of Spain, who have since been called first class grandees, and who were the Dukes of Medina Sidonia, Alburquerque, Infantado, Alba, Frias, Medina de Rioseco, Escalona, Benavente, Najera, Arcos, Medinaceli, and the Marquis of Astorga. From that time to this, there has scarcely been any change in this ceremony, which it is customary to celebrate, like the majority of State rites, in the King's antechamber.

This room forms a vast square of severe magnificence, whose ceiling, painted by Maella, represents an allegory capable of striking terror into the hearts of all those great personages destined to figure in history who gaze upon it: Truth discovered by Time. To the right of the door of the Saleta which gives entrance to the antechamber, open out two balconies which overlook the Armory Square, and on the left are two doors leading to the interior rooms, while a screen at the opposite end directly communicated with the King's Chamber.

The whole room was tapestried in rich, dark-blue cloth, covered with large *fleur-de-lis*, and the interlaced initials A and B in embossed velvet. Four large portraits of Charles IV. and Marie Louise, Ferdinand VII. and Queen Amélie, filled the niches on either side of the two doors between the Saleta and the King's Chamber. Along the walls, benches of the same tapestry were placed, broken at intervals by five magnificent consoles of marble and bronze, sustaining candelabra, and the busts of Isabella II., Francis of Assisi, Philip V., and Ferdinand VI.

Between the two balconies, upon one of these consoles, and opposite a marble mantelpiece adorned with a colossal mirror, was a large bust of Charles III., covered with the royal mantle, and whose armor was richly chiselled. All

the doors of the antechamber were thrown open, except that of the Saleta, and crowded together behind the curtains were the families and friends of the grandees, anxious to witness the lordly spectacle. Before the door of the King's Chamber was a table covered with rich crimson velvet, and a large seat of honor intended for the King.

At two o'clock exactly, the latter entered through the door of his chamber, followed by the chief majordomo, the grandee on guard, the adjutants, and grandees who had already received the hat. The King was dressed in the uniform of a captain-general and carried the three-cornered hat in his hand. He seated himself and covered his head; the grandees covered their heads and remained standing on either side of the Saleta. The ceremony was about to begin. The Keeper of the Royal Seal, whose duty it was to attest the act, now threw open the large door of solid mahogany, saying: —

"Your Majesty! — the Marquis of Benhacel!"

The latter, whose family was the oldest among the grandees, must therefore receive the hat first. A young man entered the room, his right hand in that of an old gentleman, and his left in that of the acting majordomo. The young Marquis was attired in the gala uniform of an artillery captain, and the old gentleman, decrepit and bent, in that of an admiral of the navy, his breast covered with crosses. He was the Duke of Algar, grandfather and sponsor upon this occasion to the young Marquis of Benhacel, about to receive the hat. The old gentleman had on his three-cornered hat, and the young man carried his in his hand, leaving exposed to view an energetic and characteristic Spanish head, with a somewhat sun-burned complexion, and brilliant black eyes, which seemed to reflect the steel temperament of a valiant race.

His entrance was magnificent, and a murmur of respectful sympathy greeted the illustrious pair who appeared in the doorway, old age leaning upon youth, like Hope evoking a memory, or an allegory of Experience leading Valor by

the hand, to lay a sword without spot upon the steps of the throne. On the very threshold of the room they both made the first court bow; the second was given in the centre of the room; and the last when directly in front of the King. They then saluted the grandees to the right and left, and the latter immediately responded by raising their hats. The old Duke and the majordomo now fell back a step, leaving the young grandee alone in the middle of the hall. The King, giving a military salute, said: —

"Marquis of Benhacel, put on your hat and speak."

The Marquis at once obeyed, and addressing the King, delivered a brief discourse, in which, as was customary, he gave a vigorous sketch of the glorious history of his family, which originated with Fortu of Torres, who fought with Alonzo the Wise, and died in the Alcazar of Jerez, holding between his teeth his King's flag, unable longer to sustain or defend it with his two mutilated hands. The voice of the artillery officer, timid and hesitating at first, became gradually stronger, as if these glorious actions found an echo in his heart sufficient to imitate them, and when he finally began to describe an episode of Trafalgar, which he called his family's last feat, his voice vibrated with those mysterious inflections of sentiment, which always seem to elevate the orator to a higher sphere, lending him not only the faculty to persuade, and the power to move, but even the right to command.

"Gravina was dying in his chamber, and the ship *Prince of Asturia* was returning to Cadiz, stripped of her rigging, and under command of a man who had engaged in the battle, with his three sons, and was returning home with only one, the youngest, an inexperienced midshipman. The storm increased towards midnight and it became necessary to cut loose a mast which ill-luck held fast to the round-top of the vessel by a cable, causing the ship to lop over, in imminent danger of sinking at any moment; three seamen climbed up one by one to cut the cable, and all three were struck down by the tempest and buried in the waves. Then

this man of iron, who saw his surviving crew tremble before the duty of inexorable obedience, turned to the only son left him, the idol of his heart and last hope of a grand family, and said to him simply: —

"'Sir Midshipman! it is your turn.'

"The boy, with the hatchet between his teeth, climbed to the round top, and because Our Blessed Lady helped him, cut the cable."

In the midst of the profound silence which seals men's lips and moistens their eyes when the feeling of the sublime inundates the heart and makes the breast heave with sobs, Benhacel turned slowly towards the old Duke and added, pointing him out: —

"That boy midshipman was my grandfather; the hero was his father. My own father," he continued in a voice in which symptoms of tears were visible, "also served his King in the Royal Navy, until the year '68, when in the month of September he discarded his uniform and broke his sword; I, Sire, unsheathed mine for the first time in the battle of Alcolea, and faithful to the traditions of my race, I come to offer you to-day, as grandee, what I have already given you as a soldier."

Upon saying this, he clasped the hilt of his sword with his right hand, everybody remarking the absence of his two middle fingers. A vat of powder had blown them off in Alcolea.

Benhacel ceased speaking, and in the midst of a profound silence, the greatest homage which admiration and respect can render, he uncovered his head, bent his knee to the ground, and kissed the King's hand. He then saluted the grandees on either side of him and, accompanied by his grandfather, took his place among them. The old man cried like a child; one of them said: —

"The admiral weeps, but the midshipman did not."

Unfortunately the ceremony did not conclude here. The Keeper of the Royal Seal again opened the door of the Saleta, and this time announced: —

"Your majesty!—the Marquis of Sabadell."

The farce was about to begin. Villamelon now appeared, solemn and imposing, his head erect, neck stiff, and body corpulent, leading by the hand Jacob, who embodied the most handsome, lordly, and elegant type of manhood which could be imagined. His graceful figure was arrayed in the scarlet cloak of the Maestrantes of Seville, with silver trimmings and epaulets, while crossing his breast from side to side was one of those wide sashes intended as a reward for merit and a stimulus to virtue, but used only to gratify vanity or adorn handsome figures. White breeches fitted to perfection his well formed legs, while high patent-leather boots and a three-cornered hat with exquisite white plume completed this picturesque costume.

The preliminary ceremony over, Villamelon dropped the hand of his protégé and fell back in a majestic but studied attitude, ecstatically contemplating the nostrils of Charles III. directly in front of him, and glancing about him from time to time out of the corner of his eye, saying to himself:

"How everybody is staring at me! I must look handsome."

Jacob, left alone in the middle of the antechamber, seemed somewhat abashed, but upon seeing himself the object of an attention which he well knew was not benevolent, his pride and natural audacity awoke, and he glanced about him with a look which he strove to render haughty and serene, but which was only insolent and defiant. The spectators pressed forward behind the curtains, and Currita, in the front row, devoured Jacob with her eyes; Martinez by her side, crowded against the very door-hinges, could not see him, but listened with strained attention, his big head bowed, and biting the knob of his stick. Behind the screen, directly back of the King, the rustling of silk dresses could be heard, and it was afterwards said that the Queen had there witnessed the ceremony.

The grandees craned their necks, eager to hear Jacob. In Benhacel's discourse they had just seen reflected as in a

mirror what a grandee should be, and what that motto of the ancient Hidalgos, *Noblesse oblige*, signifies, — not of course requiring that the bearer of every Castilian title shall be a genius, every grandee of Spain a hero, or the owner of every illustrious name a saint, for neither is genius inherent, nor intelligence perpetuated; heroism is not made of parchment, nor is sanctity a right of primogeniture. But it exacts and imposes, with the imperious right of a conscientious duty, the obligation of considering their nobility a trust as well as an honor; that they set an example in their thoughts, words, actions, and manners, in order to uphold the dignity and the glory which such nobility represents; that they throw, like Brennus the weight of the sword, or the weight of their intelligence, in the balance wherein the ruin or glory of nations oscillates, — an obligation to feel something more than voluptuousness, love something more than pleasure, and know how to defend a sinking throne, as that of Spain in '68, or die with a King when he is beheaded, as in France in '93.

And now, with this most noble impression so recent, which broadened their intelligence and moved their hearts, they saw in Jacob what this same nobility becomes when the rays of its glory are reflected in a miry pool, when vice robs it of its lustre and baseness soils it, when the forgetfulness of one's own dignity puts it at the disposal of a Martinez, who makes use of it for his own ends, resting his hoof upon it to raise himself, and giving it from the height of his insolence, once his ambition is attained, the most ignominious of all kicks, a mule's kick.

Jacob spoke well, for the most petted of all his conceits was his gift of eloquence; he did not dare, however, confide his discourse to memory, and contented himself with reading it, fearing to forget some of the clever sophistries with which he sought to scale the large boulders closing in upon him on all sides. He accordingly delivered a masterly address, in which many thought they detected the hoof of the Apis ox; and when he ceased speaking significant looks

were exchanged on all sides. The fact was established; Martinez and his followers were chanting the palinode, and the grandee of Spain consort was the one commissioned to carry the news to the monarch's ears.

The Government partisans took alarm, and Señor Gallego, who wandered surreptitiously among the spectators, wrinkled the circumflex accent on his nose at the sight of this horde of hungry barbarians issuing from the devastated forests of the Revolution, and threatening to invade the fertile meadows of the existing government, which they alone cultivated. What would be the King's attitude? All eyes asked this question, and it excited everybody's curiosity during the reading of the discourses of the ten remaining grandees waiting to receive the hat with which the ceremony was concluded.

The King finally arose, and with his head covered, took a turn around the antechamber, conversing with and saluting all the grandees. No one breathed; the moment had come to know if Martinez's petition was accepted or rejected; if it was necessary to stipulate with the invaders, or pursue them to the sound of cymbals and horns, as dogs flying with bones beyond the confines of their deserted forests. There was a bad sign: the King passed Villamelon without speaking to him, only nodding to him slightly; he then stopped a long time to converse with the old Duke of Algar and his grandson, and finally approached Jacob, who was standing behind them. Throughout the room one could have heard the rustle of an angel's wings, or the flight of death itself. The King stood still before Jacob, and looked at him, smiling with a certain droll malice.

"How are you, Sabadell? And your friend Martinez? I have been told he is very fond of violets. Tell him there are some very early ones to be found at the Casa de Campo. I shall be there Thursday, — at four o'clock." Without adding another word he turned on his heel. He had said enough, however, and a tremendous sigh was heard behind the curtain to the left, as if a heavy weight had

been lifted from some overburdened breast; it was the Apis ox, his Excellency Martinez, who could have snorted at that moment like the young men of his province in their explosions of joy, or have squeezed his illustrious ally, Currita, in his brutal arms, like a Hercules embracing an insect. She, unable to hide the keen joy of triumph, said to him suddenly: —

"Martinez! you must order the uniform."

A little mocking voice, which came from no one could ever tell where, exclaimed at her elbow: —

"By just turning Don Amadeo's wrong side out, you will have one without extra cost."

The most picturesque part of the ceremony was still to take place, which was to be for Jacob the height of his triumph. The King having retired to his chamber, the grandees who had just received the hat left the antechamber to be presented to the King's body-guard, by order of antiquity. The latter had formed on both sides of the double staircase, and the grandees, followed by their sponsors, descended by the right side and ascended by the left, to the sound of the halberds of the body-guard giving the salute of honor. The spectators thronged the front of the gallery and the ground-floor of the superb staircase, whose dome, painted by Giaquinto, represented Spain offering to Religion her virtues and trophies.

When Jacob again returned to the gallery, and Currita, with other friends, came forward to greet him, eager to offer their congratulations, satisfied pride reflected in his face a species of vertigo, and he felt like exclaiming with the Nabuchodonosor of the opera: "Io non Re, sono Dio!"

He glanced about for Martinez, and saw him about ten paces off, leaning upon his stick, his big head wagging, and his rustic smile upon his lips; he also was receiving congratulations. A group of courtiers surrounded him, squeezing and crushing each other in their efforts to shake his brawny fist with their daintily gloved hands, showering upon him at the same time their flattering speeches. The

general who had before accompanied the Minister of Grace and Justice invited him most cordially to a hunting party at his country-seat of Pardillo. He was a grandee of Spain, and was known in the Palace as the "weather-vane," from always being the first to veer in the direction of a new minister.

It was snowing furiously, and Fernandito, shivering and tired, was anxious to be off. Currita invited Martinez and Jacob to dinner, and both accepted; the latter, however, decided to return home first to change his uniform. In the hall-way upon the card-tray he saw a large official-looking document, which he picked up in passing, while Damian was taking off his white Santiago cape with a red cross on the left side. One of his high boots hurt him very much, and without waiting for Damian, he tried to pull it off himself as soon as he entered his bedroom. He could not, however, get it off entirely, and with the boot half on sank into an arm-chair until his valet should come. The latter delayed, and Jacob, impatient, opened the document meanwhile. Upon a sheet of white paper, standing out before his eyes, was the red seal which had formerly secured the outside envelope of the Masonic documents. He gazed at it a moment in terror. It looked to him like a drop of blood.

CHAPTER XIV

The following day was Carnival Sunday, and Madrid awoke to find the ground a mass of slush; but with a radiant sky overhead, a strong north wind had swept away the clouds, and frozen in the corners the scraps of snow which had succeeded in escaping the municipal broom. The cold was intense, and helped laziness to keep even the earliest risers tucked away in the warm bed-clothes. Damian heard eight o'clock strike and turned over again in bed, hoping the Marquis would not require his services until late in the

morning, as usual. A violent pull at the bell made him jump, startled. The Marquis rang, and in such a hurry that even before Damian was half dressed two other sharp pulls resounded throughout the house, in whose ring the valet seemed to detect all the symptoms of overflowing bad-humor and unbridled impatience. Arranging with his fingers his black and curly head of hair, he opened the door of the study abruptly, in order to make a short cut through it to his master's bedroom, but stood rooted to the spot, as stupefied as if he had seen the sun rise in the middle of the night. The Marquis, already dressed, was seated at his writing-table, a sealed letter in his hand.

"Did your Lordship call?"

"I did not call; I rang three times," exclaimed Jacob, angrily; but instantly controlling himself he handed the letter to Damian, saying to him without looking at him:—

"See that this letter is delivered. Take it yourself this very moment. If the gentleman does not live there, which may be the case, ask the porter for his new address, and deliver the letter at once." Damian made a mute bow and left the room, reading the address on the letter which was as follows: "Señor Don Francis Xavier Perez Cueto, — Calle de X — No. 10 — Third Floor — To the right."

Damian shrugged his shoulders, for the said Perez Cueto seemed to him some poor devil of a fellow, not worth the trouble of delivering to him a letter in person. Jacob, left alone, asked himself what a man can find to do in this life, who rises at eight o'clock in the morning. The bell of the parish church of St. Joseph began to ring at that moment as if in answer, bidding him go to mass, and Jacob then remembered that he had not been since the first year of his marriage, fourteen years before. He felt a certain sadness and foreboding which afflicted him in spite of his triumphs of the evening before, — a presentiment which had haunted him from the moment the Masons had repeated their ridiculous joke, which now as then had frightened and irritated him, arousing in him finally his fiery and reckless activity of

the moment, at the sight of this mysterious danger which he might already twice have put an end to, without having done so. He then bemoaned his imprudent apathy, and resolving to amend it, confessed to himself in the depths of his heart that —

"The coward
Mourns a lost opportunity."

He did not, however, feel his case to be hopeless, having Garibaldi's letters in his possession, which explained his conduct and vouched for his honor. It was true these letters had lost much of their influence through the death of the old revolutionist during that interval, and through his own delay in delivering them; but he was not wanting in resources, and with clever lies and tricks could explain all to their satisfaction. His position, moreover, would soon undergo a change, and would acquire great importance.

It was the settled opinion of all, that the Apis ox would undoubtedly be made President of the Council, as soon as the existing Cabinet, already tottering, should fall; and then, ah! then! he would surely be made minister, and from the heights of the blue bench, once in power, could laugh with impunity at the jeers and menaces of the Masons. That night, while tossing about in his bed wide-awake, unable to allay his fears in spite of his reasonings, he decided not to neglect this time to take an active part in the third act of this stupid comedy of the seal.

Garibaldi's letters were addressed to one H°. Neptune, a great personage in the lodges, who, divested of his trident, his crown of sea-weed and symbolical three points, was reduced in ordinary life to one Don Francis Xavier Perez Cueto, manufacturer of starch, in the environs of the Court, a being totally unknown to everybody; behind which incognito, according to the opinion of many, was hidden a certain famous personage who lived and died conspicuously. Jacob was not ignorant of this, for he had had occasion to become acquainted with the fact, during the time of his intimate friendship with Count Reus. He accordingly wrote a letter

to Perez Cueto, couched in very courteous but imperative terms, requesting of him an interview in order to confer with him upon a matter of great importance. In the letter he adhered strictly to the Masonic formula, and signed it with his old alias, — H°. Byron, based upon his astonishing likeness to his Lordship the poet.

Damian would require at least half an hour to go and return from Perez Cueto's house, and meanwhile Jacob, with Garibaldi's letter before him, began to jot down upon a piece of paper a rough summary of the lies and plots with which he must prove his innocence to H°. Neptune. Damian's return surprised him still employed in this task. Questioning him instantly with a glance, he was informed that Señor Perez Cueto was at home and that the letter had been delivered. Jacob breathed freely, as if the business was already on the point of being brought to a speedy close, and not knowing of anything to do between that and breakfast-time he deemed it best to go back to bed again. It was decidedly nothing less than hopeless aberration of mind for people to rise before midday.

"If any letter comes for me," he said to Damian, "call me at once; if not, come in at two o'clock punctually."

And as no letter came, Damian entered his master's bedroom at two o'clock sharp, to find his Lordship sleeping soundly. The latter arose in a very bad humor, dressed himself slowly with his accustomed elegance, and breakfasted frugally and without appetite, finally starting for the Veloz Club, where he charged Damian to deliver to him instantly any letter or message which might come for him. Once at the Club his bad-humor was suddenly dissipated, and he began to laugh and amuse himself like a boy; Gorito Sardona and Paco Velez, seated in one of the balconies, were worrying the passers-by with a little basket, and Jacob gayly joined in the sport. It was a pretty little basket adorned with ribbons and bells, and fastened with a cord just long enough to escape the heads of the passers-by. They threw it with all their might at the ladies, who, startled

by the noise, shrank back, raising their heads quickly; if they were young and pretty a deluge of sweets and flowers were showered upon them, but if they were old and ugly, they poked their tongues out at them with the greatest insolence.

The sport, although beneath the dignity of a future minister, was very amusing to Jacob, and he instantly ordered at the Mahonesa for the morrow several pounds of confetti, — a species of bonbon stuffed with flour, with which the masqueraders are pelted in the Corso de Roma. At nightfall, Jacob left the balcony to go to Currita's house, where he had an appointment with the Apis ox, made the evening before. A certain famous senator recently at odds with the Government had requested of Martinez an interview through medium of the lady, who hastened to offer them her own table as neutral ground. With this object in view, both must, therefore, dine that night at the Countess of Albornoz's house, and Jacob, the spoiled child of the new party, must not be absent either upon this occasion from his chief's side.

The future minister started up Calle Alcala, crossed by the Puerta del Sol, and turned into Calle Carmen. Opposite the church of this name, a gypsy girl, grotesquely dressed in pink and yellow, was discordantly playing a waltz from the *Grand Duchess*. A very tall man mounted on stilts, which raised him to the level of the second stories, collected money from the balconies by playing the clarinet and making pirouettes, and the by-standers roared with laughter watching the contortions of the stilt-dancer, and the various grotesque masqueraders capering about in the mud, whirling dizzily around in time to the street-player's waltz. The twilight shadows lent a dark and odious tint to this picture of degradation, in which the filth of souls seemed to wallow in the filth of the streets. Jacob succeeded in making his way through the crowd, by keeping close to the church steps. All at once he stopped, surprised, and immediately concealed himself, as if frightened, behind some half-

intoxicated masqueraders dancing in front of him, who were disguised in patch-work chintz quilts tied over their heads.

By Jacob's very side, going in the same direction, were two men, seemingly foreigners, walking arm in arm to avoid becoming separated in the crowd. The elder of the two wore a red sash which covered his shirt, and an ear-ring in his left ear; the younger man was short and chubby, his plump face wholly smooth. Sabadell fell back, gazing at them with a startled look, but as if he wished to be sure of their identity.

He was not left long in doubt. The elder was an Italian named Cassanello, whom he had met in the lodges of Milan, and had seen again that same year in Caprera, at Garibaldi's house. The two men suddenly turned, not being able to make their way through the crowd; Jacob, alarmed, instantly covered his face with his handkerchief, as if about to blow his nose, and rapidly ascending the steps of Carmel, entered the church. At first he could see little for the darkness, which was however cut in the background by a focus of brilliant light, in the centre of which the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. At the foot of the altar could be dimly seen a solid black mass, proceeding from which at intervals was a soft murmur, slow and uniform, which seemed to respond to another voice more energetic and pronounced, "Ora pro nobis!"

The fugitive, bewildered, paused for a moment, with a certain respectful awe, similar to that of the scoffer who suddenly finds himself in the depths of the catacombs in the midst of divine service; from the street came the confused sounds of the waltz from the *Grand Duchess* and the cries of the rabble. He then took two steps at random, extending his arm in order to open the door leading to Calle Montera, and stumbled against a confessional placed near the door to the right. The little middle door of the latter immediately opened, and a very white hand in a very black sleeve was thrust out. Jacob recoiled a step in surprise, whereupon the little door again closed, and the hand dis-

appeared, while a calm voice out of the depths of the darkness was heard saying: —

"I beg your pardon. I thought you were coming to confession."

Jacob's impious pride rose in rebellion at these simple words, and he answered brutally: —

"That is only fit for old women."

The voice, without losing its serene calmness, then said from the darkness: —

"Vocavi et renuistis."

"Vocavi et renuistis"? Jacob asked himself, without understanding the significance of the terrible words. And opening the door violently, a strong gust of air deafened him with the waltz from the *Grand Duchess*, completely extinguishing that sweet, heavenly murmur and pious cry for mercy, — "Ora pro nobis!"

Through out-of-the-way streets and looking behind him at every instant as if being pursued, he reached the Countess of Albornoz's house in a very agitated frame of mind. The meeting with this man under existing circumstances had inspired in him a terror similar to that which some months before he had experienced upon perceiving in Uncle Frasquito's album the empty spaces formerly filled by the three seals. What was this cunning knave doing at the Court? Did his presence have anything to do with this affair of the Masons? Could there possibly be in all this something more than a stupid joke?

Currita was enchanting that night, with her little red head combed *à la Grecque* and an odd costume of divers colors most befitting the capricious Carnival season. She had not driven that afternoon in the Prado; the never-ending parade of the Carnival days annoyed her very much, subject as one always was to the impertinent remarks in which envy and insolence indulge behind the screen of a mask! How many times she had listened to them before taking warning!

She therefore stayed at home like a sensible woman, taking care of Fernandito, who was very weak and dispirited. That

night Martinez was the first to arrive, and shortly afterwards came the senator, Don Vicente Cascante. Jacob had not as yet come, and Currita, disgusted, and imagining that every word uttered by the Apis ox behind Jacob's back was an injustice to this dear friend, left the room impatiently to look for him. Jacob, as a most intimate and confidential friend, was accustomed at times to go to Fernandito's boudoir or apartments, and not show himself in the drawing-room until the dinner hour. On her way through an ante-sala Currita met a man-servant, who handed her a letter upon a silver card-tray.

"For the Marquis of Sabadell," he said. Currita took it hurriedly and looked at the envelope; the handwriting was a woman's, English style, with large and running letters, and underneath Jacob's name was written, "Urgent!"

"Who brought this?" she asked.

"Damian brought it. His Lordship has been expecting the letter all day, and left word when it came to leave it at the Club. Damian went there, but his Lordship had already left. He then took a cab and brought it here in all haste."

Currita stood for a moment thinking, and finally said: — "And the Marquis has not come?"

"Not yet, your Ladyship."

"Very well, I will give it to him when he arrives."

And with the letter in her hand she entered her boudoir, her brows knit, mouth puckered, and eyes stern. By the light of the large lamp supported by the ebony negro, she examined the letter on all sides; the envelope was of very heavy and elegant paper, contained no crest, seal, or initial whatsoever, and was only lightly sealed with the glue of the flap.

Currita introduced a fine marble knife beneath the latter, and the thick envelope without bending or breaking opened easily. Within was a square card such as fashionable women were accustomed to use for their billets-doux, the upper left-hand corner, which must have contained some crest or name being purposely torn off. In a few brief

words was the following: "The appointment which you ask of me compromises me greatly, but yielding to the sentiments which inspire me, I will meet you to-night, between twelve and one o'clock, in Calle de X — No. 4 — main entrance — to the right. Silence and discretion. Do not tell the porter my name; ask for Señora de Rosales. — N."

"How delicious!" murmured Currita, and biting her lips until the blood came, she read the letter twice, first seating herself in an arm-chair. For some time she sat very thoughtful, the only indications of her emotion being an almost imperceptible little trembling of the hand which held the letter, a slight contraction of the lips, and a stern expression in her eyes, steadily bent upon the floor. Her glance was no longer that of the nymph Calypso, proud and joyful, overflowing with gratified vanity and pleasing satisfaction, but was rather the jealous, furious, and wild look of the Medusa which Seneca describes, terrible and imposing in the midst of her death-like calm. Without losing an iota of her own calm, Currita jotted down upon a sheet of crested paper the address contained in the letter; she read it over for the fourth time, and put it back in the envelope, which she resealed, holding it for a moment near the fire that it might thoroughly dry, and finally tossed it upon her pretty writing-table. She then rang for Kate.

"Has the Marquis of Sabadell come?"

"Yes, Milady, and is in the drawing-room with the gentlemen."

"On the desk there, is a letter for him; see that it is delivered immediately."

Kate picked it up and started towards the door, but the lady, ever cunning and astute, without allowing any one to see what was in progress, said in a very weak and complaining voice: —

"My dear, first prepare me a dose of antipirine; I feel a sick-headache coming on."

Kate at once complied, stirring in a glass with a dainty little spoon the desired dose.

"Has the letter been delivered?" asked Currita.

"Your Ladyship told me to prepare the antipirine first."

"Well go, girl! at once! don't you see *urgent* is written on the envelope?"

Kate was no sooner out of the room than Currita threw the medicine in the fireplace, and went hurriedly to the blue drawing-room where Jacob was. She wished to see the impression which the reading of the letter would produce on him. A moment afterwards a servant presented it to him upon a silver tray. Jacob pounced with great eagerness upon it, and barely looking at the envelope, tore it open. Currita watched him closely, but could not detect the slightest sign of pleasure or satisfaction in his countenance. She only remarked a great anxiety while he was reading, and then a deep preoccupation, which lasted during the whole course of the dinner. At times he gossiped long without ceasing for an instant, with a certain nervous excitement which lent brilliancy to his conversation, and alarmed Currita; again he became suddenly dumb and sat dreaming and preoccupied, completely oblivious of what was passing about him. He was sadly perplexed; he knew of course this strange letter was H°. Neptune's reply, for of no one except the latter had he requested an appointment; but he could not understand the singular manner of its compilation, and the evident desire which it evinced of concealing all which could reveal its Masonic character, making it appear only in the nature of a gallant and mysterious appointment, which had already completely deceived Currita. It awakened in him the well grounded suspicion that the letter might conceal some snare, and his fears redoubled; but remembering the ridiculous masquerades, the pomp and mystery with which the Masons always surround themselves, he tried to convince himself of that which would most favor his desires and banish his fears; that it was merely a ridiculous and impertinent joke, which must be stopped, and that Perez Cueto's letter was a crowning Carnival jest. Suddenly, in one of those moments of pre-occupation caused by the con-

flict of his ideas, he said to Don Casimiro Pantojas, who was seated next him: —

"Tell me, Pantojas. What does *vocavi et renuistis* mean?"

The good Don Casimiro regarded him for a moment, very much astonished, but pleased at being able to display his learning, he at once replied: —

"It signifies, literally, 'I called and you rejected me.' They are the words of Isaias, if I remember rightly, which the Lord applies to those hardened sinners who resist his mercy."

Jacob burst out laughing, and Currita asked him maliciously: —

"Are you thinking of making a homily on this text in the Senate?"

"Not I," replied Jacob. "It was a homily, however, made to me this afternoon." And with the addition of ludicrous details, he related the scene of the confessional in the Church of Carmel, taking very good care not to tell the real motive of his entrance into the sacred place. According to him it had been impossible to get across Calle Carmen and he made a short cut through the church, that he might go out by the side door leading to Calle Montera. Everybody laughed at the priest's mistake, and Don Vicente Cascante, the King's senator, swelling pompously, said sententiously:

"But have you all noticed how in the midst of the absurdity of the situation, the pride and insolence of the clergy is ever paramount, always disposing of heavenly maxims as if God had given them the right. It is insufferable. I have said a hundred times, and will never tire repeating it, that the hardness and impassibility of the clergy is what is ruining the Church in Spain." And that he might inflame the zeal for the House of God which was consuming him, Don Vicente Cascante himself consumed the breast of a quail, with an expression of profound affliction.

At eleven o'clock that night, Villamelon's palace, curiously enough, seemed to be the abode of peace and quietude. The

Countess had retired very early to her apartments with a violent headache, which had been troubling her the whole afternoon. The Marquis had also retired, complaining of excessive nausea; and the numerous corps of servants, freed from all restraint and certain of not being missed, had scattered here and there throughout the numerous centres of amusement open in Madrid on Carnival nights to persons of all classes. Not all the inmates of the palace were asleep, however; at half-past eleven the little garden gate next to the sheep-fold was stealthily opened, and a black figure stole cautiously out into the street, locking the door on the outside, and walked rapidly away with the key in its pocket. It was a woman in masquerade costume, who looked very small, in spite of her high heels, and head-dress of wide black ribbons in the form of a flower, which she wore to increase her height. She had, over a short skirt of black silk, an ample domino of the same color, her neck and arms completely enveloped in a costly gray fur cape. The *incognita* rapidly crossed the various lanes, without the slightest sign of fear, and turned from the wide street of St. Bernard into the little plaza of Santo Domingo. She stopped a moment on the corner and glanced about her. The crowd of people here was still very great, — masqueraders en route to the balls, and passers-by and carriages crossing from one side to the other. On the corner of Calle Tudescos, were three cabs standing in line, the coachmen asleep on the box seats. The *incognita* approached the one in the middle, opened the carriage door herself, and bade the coachman, who awoke with a start, to drive to the corner of Calle X and the boulevard of Recoletas; the first was one of those vertical streets which terminate at Calle Serrano.

The *incognita* alighted at the place mentioned, and this time, bidding the coachman wait, turned into Calle X, looking from one side of the street to the other, as if inspecting the ground. The street was very short, the left-hand side at that time being formed by an iron railing which enclosed the garden of a hotel fronting on the Recoletas boulevard,

next to which was a vacant lot full of rubbish, and the corner of a house on Calle Serrano, in which was a little door seemingly sealed up. Across the street was the side façade of a certain public building, then a sumptuous hotel, while the sidewalk terminated with another edifice in the course of construction and the corner of a house on Calle Serrano, which contained no door whatsoever. The *incognita*, in whom the reader must already have recognized the intrepid Currita, seemed very much perplexed. There was evidently no No. 4 in Calle X, there being no other house except the sumptuous hotel in which lived — what a coincidence! — the Countess of Mazacan herself. Could there possibly be a mistake in the number of the house, and could the owner of this costly dwelling be the author of the letter? This seemed to Currita very improbable, and a certain incident put her altogether out of doubt; the large crystal door which closed in the porte-cochère at the rear of the hotel suddenly opened, and a carriage was driven out which stopped at the foot of the staircase. Neither the coachman nor footman was in livery, nor was there either coat of arms, initials or crest on the carriage. Currita's practised eye immediately detected an adventure in all this.

Very soon two ladies came out dressed as maids, with very elaborate mantillas from Manila, silk handkerchiefs on their heads, and masks of rose-color velvet. From a noisy outburst of laughter which escaped one of them upon entering the carriage, Currita recognized Leopoldina Pastor; and in the tall figure and confidant air with which she gave her orders to the groom she instantly divined the second to be none other than the Countess of Mazacan herself. The carriage started off and Currita again breathed freely. Doubtless the two friends were en route to the Royal Theatre intent upon some escapade.

The lady again entered her cab, resolved to wait there patiently. Concealing herself as much as possible, she tried to make herself comfortable in a corner of the cab, gazing

without ceasing out of the little window at the silent street. The latter, completely deserted, extended before her, rising in a gentle slope towards Calle Serrano, along which street, going and coming with a certain fantastic aspect, one could see, as through the lens of a magic lantern, people hurrying by on account of the cold, carriages conveying masqueraders to the balls, and from time to time the cars passing with a deafening noise, which looked at a distance like monstrous ambulatory lanterns. Only two gas-jets gave light to the street; the hotel porter had locked the door, and the soft light of the waning moon clearly revealed every object.

A distant clock struck the quarter-past twelve, and shortly afterwards a very tall man turned slowly into the street, coming from the direction of Calle Serrano; he wore a long cloak and a tall hat, while both his hands were crossed behind his back. He looked like some wandering lunatic taking the fresh midnight air, perhaps a genius musing upon a masterpiece, or a desperado seeking the nearest tree upon which to hang himself by the light of the moon, or a lonely spot in which to put a bullet through his breast.

Currita gazed at him with that feeling of terror which anything strange or mysterious inspires in us during the small hours of the night, and shrank more and more within the corner of her cab. At the very corner of Recoletas the man with the long coat passed another who came hurriedly from that direction. Currita glanced out of the little window at the back, and her heart beat quickly. It was Jacob, elegantly muffled up in an Andalusian cape with red revers, and a light-colored slouch hat on his head. He turned the corner without noticing the cab, slowly climbed the sloping street, and examined the houses attentively. The same perplexity which had assailed Currita now also beset him, upon realizing there was no No. 4; the lady, speechless with anger, watched him, her hand upon the knob of the carriage door, as if lying in wait for the moment to waylay him. Jacob, tired at last of walking up and down,

and beginning to think the whole thing a farce, and Perez Cueto's letter a final Carnival jest, decided as a last resource to knock at the little barred door, the only one in the street save that of the hotel; the knocks reverberated in the silence with a strange echoing sound which frightened Currita.

No one replied, and Jacob, impatient, knocked at least three times, each time louder and louder; he then stamped his foot angrily, and going on his way turned the corner of Calle Serrano. This was the moment selected by Currita to spring out of the carriage and run after Jacob, fearing he might find the door of the house on the other side and so escape her after all. Jacob, however, had not thought of this, and could not have done so in any case. Currita found him standing on the sidewalk, attentively examining the façade of the house; the latter was of a modest appearance and the door was already closed. On the first floor was an undertaker's establishment. The two friends met face to face, and notwithstanding the lady's disguise, Jacob instantly recognized her; with more surprise than disgust he advanced to meet her.

"Child! What are you doing here? Why did you come?"

She, agitated by conflicting emotions, of which anger was paramount, answered with bitter sarcasm: —

"Oh! nothing at all. I only came to show you where to find No. 4."

"But how have you heard this?" exclaimed the other, astonished. "Come, come, you have been deceived." And grasping her by the arm, they both again turned the corner of Calle X. The lady, blind with anger, now began to pour forth all the confused sentiments of her heart, but always in an insulting tone, like a volcano which casts forth all the matter in its bosom, forming a solid mass or torrent of lava, which desolates and destroys whatever crosses its path. Jacob tried in vain to prove his innocence; she did not give him time to speak, and with her slender little hands tore off his mask, and raised her finger-nails to his face, as if she

would like to tear his eyes out. Jacob, irritated by Perez Cueto's hoax, and vexed by Currita's reproaches, fearing also to lose the latter's friendship, for him indispensable, saw himself at last forced to confess to her the entire truth, with the object of pacifying her. He at once succeeded; upon hearing the name of Masons, the lady's anger was instantly quenched, and in its stead she was filled with an almost childish terror, strange in a character of such energetic temperament.

"Let us go! let us go! For God's sake, I beg of you, Jacob, do not remain here. Come! come!" And with an accent of genuine horror, looking terrified in all directions, she said in almost a whisper: —

"They are excommunicated! Don't you know? Excommunicated!"

Jacob, rightly believing terror to be contagious, for he felt that which agitated the lady take possession of his own soul, tried nevertheless to soothe her.

"Don't be foolish, dear, don't be childish. Let us go, if you wish; but calm yourself. Am I not with you? Did you come alone?"

"Yes."

"On foot? What madness."

"No. I have a cab waiting."

"Very well, I'll see you home first, and will afterwards drive to my own house."

"Are you armed?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes, I have a revolver."

Both continued their way towards Recoletas; she glancing about, filled with nervous dread, and he trying to shake off the uneasiness which, in spite of himself, Currita's strange terror caused him, with the idea that Perez Cueto's letter was a Carnival joke. Upon turning the corner, they both looked at each other in silence, as if the excess of their fright paralyzed their tongues. The carriage had disappeared, and neither to right nor left could they see any signs of it, even at a distance.

"Had you paid him?" asked Jacob, stupefied. And she clinging to him, and trembling like a leaf, answered in a low tone, "No."

It was most strange, and Jacob felt all his uneasiness return with renewed force; it was impossible that the coachman should have gone away without being paid, unless some one else had obliged or bribed him to do so. For a moment he felt an agonizing perplexity, a real fear, which invaded his naturally valiant soul, making him shudder like a robust body in an icy blast.

"Let us go on," he said.

Both continued walking, arm in arm, without uttering a word, crossing the boulevard diagonally to the opposite side of the street, as it seemed somewhat less lonely. Currita walked very rapidly, neither looking to right nor left; her eyes fixed upon the lighted street-lamps, which seemed like life and salvation to her, although she felt an insuperable terror and desire to turn back. Upon gaining the sidewalk she breathed more freely, and ventured to look about her. Everything was quiet, and only on Calle Almirante, some distance away, did she see a man with his hands in his pockets, whistling the march from *Pan y Toros.* Passing the church of San Pascuale, Currita crossed herself hurriedly, and Jacob pressing her arm affectionately, said in a mocking tone: —

"Silly!"

They had now reached the War Department, and here Currita became more tranquil, for this solitude which terrified her began to show some signs of life. A carriage drove through Calle Alcala and turned into the Prado. In the garden of the War Department gleamed a sentinel's musket, while the voices of several men singing were heard very near, on the other side of the grating. This corner of the Department consisted of an isolated pavilion, one story high, with four façades, each containing three windows. Two men, well dressed, but shouting and yelling like drunkards, turned the corner of the pavilion, colliding with Jacob and

Currita under the third window. The taller of the two stood suddenly still, while the shorter man stepped to the other side of the gutter, allowing the two to pass between them. In an instant there was a dreadful scene. Currita felt that a brutal push had torn her violently from Jacob's side; that another vigorous hand had pulled off the latter's mask, which fell to the ground under the window, while something liquid and warm spurted forth as from a jet, gushing over her dress and hands. Terror gave her wings to fly through Calle Alcala, without an idea in her mind to define what had happened to her, or the ability to utter a cry. One, however, doleful and agonizing, reached her ears, while another voice, vigorous and distressed, pierced the air lugubriously in the silence of the night: —

"Help! Police! A man dead!"

Immediately afterwards a voice called three times, "Halt!" and then, one after another, like cries of protest and menace, two shots were fired. Currita, faint and breathless, clung to the railing of St. Joseph's church; she felt like turning back, then like running on. She wanted to cry for help, or to die then and there. She now heard the night watchmen's whistles, and several windows thrown open. She saw a hooded man running on the opposite side of the street, with his pike poised, and lantern raised.

Instinct rather than reason made her then realize the risk she herself ran, and again she fled through Calle Caballero de Gracia, without stopping an instant, scarcely breathing, neither seeing nor hearing, nor even thinking, until, panting and without knowing how, she found herself in her boudoir, her limbs rigid, sight wild, and eyes starting out of their sockets, while before her was the ebony negro, holding aloft the lighted lamp, as if to burn into her brain the horrible picture which was again revealed to her in the fearful immobility of his white teeth, in their sinister smile, eternal as the grimace of a lost soul. By the light of this lamp she looked at her hands, which she felt were damp and sticky. An intense horror thrilled through her, body and

soul, while an idea at last pierced her mind, like a nail driven by a hammer, — that of her daughter Lili kneeling in the studio showing her little hands stained with her brother's blood and repeating, with the gloomy vibration of a boundless terror: —

"Blood! mamma! Blood!"

CHAPTER XV

The authorities delayed a whole hour before coming to identify and carry away the body. The latter was lying across the sidewalk stretched at full length on its right side, the head resting against the base of the War Department pavilion beneath the second window. On the right breast was a large contusion, doubtless caused by the force of the fall, and on the left side of the neck was a tremendous dagger's-thrust, which divided the carotid artery. A torrent of blood gushing from it had soaked his clothes and wet the ground. Lying upon the sidewalk, at the very corner of Recoletas and Calle Alcala, was a costly cape of Castor fur, also stained with blood, which no one dared touch until the judge arrived. The body was promptly identified. In the pocket was found the note received that evening, making the false appointment, the two letters from Garibaldi to H°. Neptune, and various cards upon which was engraven the name of the Marquis of Sabadell. This name was well known, and to the natural horror which every crime inspires was united the fright, mixed with surprise, with which people contemplate a fortune engulfed in the abyss of misfortune, or see one in power fall from the cushions of his carriage to an autopsy table in a hospital. The news flew from one end of the Court to the other, without causing a single tear to flow, but everywhere awakening astonishment, dismay, and above all, curiosity, eager and rabid curiosity, if so it may be called, to know the

particulars of this mysterious tragedy, more interesting than the lugubrious episodes of Ann Radcliffe, or the dramatic adventures of Clarissa Harlowe. Several members of the Veloz Club hastened to the hospital to see the body, and all day long, at the corner of the War Department, large crowds of people stood gazing with a certain awful curiosity at the base of that window about which, even yet, the sinister shadow of crime seemed to hover. In the afternoon the great majority of masqueraders and people driving in the Prado or Recoletas avoided this spot drenched with blood, all taking the opposite side, and casting lingering and fearful looks at the second window. The newspapers published numerous extras, which were cried through the streets, and now several particulars of the crime were made known, and commented upon. Conspicuous among them was the declaration of the sentinel of the War Department. According to the latter, at about one o'clock in the morning, he saw through the railing on the Recoletas side, a man and woman pass hurriedly by, coming from the direction of the Castellana. They were walking arm in arm, he muffled up in an Andalusian cape with red revers, while she was enveloped in a gray fur cape, with a black mask over her face. Through the railing fronting on Calle Alcala, he also saw, at the same time, two men coming along that street singing and shouting as if intoxicated; both couples crossed in front of the pavilion through the façade overlooking Recoletas, and there the sentinel lost sight of them. A few moments afterwards he heard, in the silence of the night, the sound of a falling body, and then one of those cries of agony which one never forgets or mistakes. He saw the masked woman fly desperately down Calle Alcala, while the two men, intoxicated before, but perfectly sober now, ran, one towards the Castellana, and the other in the direction of the Plaza de Toros. The latter stumbled against the Cibeles fountain, and he heard a splash of water as if he had fallen in, but he immediately scrambled out again, his rapid flight soon losing him in the darkness. The sen-

tinel, unable to leave his post on account of the countersign and the railing, climbed nevertheless upon the latter, and saw the man with the cape stretched at full length upon the ground. He now shouted for the police, called three times after the fugitives to halt, and finally gave the alarm by firing two shots from his musket. Three watchmen, an officer, and two soldiers from the Department immediately responded, hastening into the street through the little door of the pavilion. The man with the cape was already dead.

It was inferred from all this that there was a woman at the bottom of it, and curiosity, excited to an almost morbid pitch, especially in high social circles, was confounded by the secrecy of the verbal process. It was known, however, that on the morning after the crime, Damian, the victim's *valet de chambre* was arrested, and on the afternoon of the same day one Don Francis Xavier Perez Cueto, manufacturer of starch in the suburbs of the Court, was called upon as a witness. Since then nothing could be gleaned from any exterior sign, whether judicial investigations were progressing or not; and it finally began to be whispered, with a certain apprehensive stupefaction, that the hand of the Masons was in it; that Sabadell's assassins would remain as unknown and as unpunished as those of his friend General Prim; and that the crime of Recoletas would always be as mysterious a secret as that of Calle Turco. But now, most unexpectedly, when these whispers began to take ground, and to excite in everybody the terror which all hidden power inspires, and the indignation which every cowardly plot arouses, another contrary rumor was circulated, which originated no one knew how, but which nevertheless spread on all sides, with every appearance of certainty, like a subterranean well which disseminates its damp filtrations in every direction. It asserted that all this was but the result of a gallant intrigue, that the judge had in his possession a billet-doux, conceding an appointment, and also an accusing article belonging to the prime mover of the crime, a cape of Castor fur, marked on the inside with a black label,

upon which was written in red letters, "Worth, Rue de la Paix, Paris."

Two periodicals which, according to the opinion of many, belonged to the Masonic sect, published violent articles against the Spanish tribunals, which imprison the poor man like a criminal, and sweep him from the streets like an obscene animal, while they cross their arms and close their eyes before the one in power, who conceals his crimes beneath a shield of gold, against which the sword of Justice is shattered.

The daring was so great, the audacity so incredible, that opinion was completely misled by these perfidious insinuations, and the finger of suspicion began to point to the Countess of Albornoz, the threshold of her palace being stared at with the same horror with which, three days before, the public had stared at the corner of the War Department; singular aberration of the public conscience, which God in his infinite justice sometimes permits, in order to punish by a calumny a real crime as yet unavenged.

No one in Madrid held Currita responsible for Velarde's blood, shed before the eyes of all through her fault; but now they laid at her door Sabadell's death, of which she was innocent, and which she would gladly have redeemed at the cost of any sacrifice. For the lady's grief was in reality great, although not expansive nor obtrusive; one of those laconic griefs, common to energetic souls which redouble upon themselves in the depths of the heart, increasing in intensity like the throes of the wounded gladiator, who finds strength in his very agony to double the muscles of his body in a last attempt at a more formidable attack. This small, weak woman enclosed within her feeble body one of those energetic souls which swell at the sight of danger and defy it, which need no help in grief, nor accomplices in crime; she was herself sufficient unto herself, and shaking off the terror which had consumed her the night before, with the vigorous thrust of the bull who tosses far from him the spears which hurt and vex him, she prepared

to defend herself, resolved to fight inch by inch, quietly and firmly, all the consequences of that horrible night.

But first of all she must reflect and plan, prepare her replies and arrange her questions. Taking advantage of the illness of Fernandito, prostrated by one of those attacks of imbecility which bring with them softening of the brain, she took all of Monday to herself, and gave explicit orders that she would see no one, imagining that importunate visitors would at once besiege her with their indiscreet questions, impertinent pity, and annoying compassion, as had been the case at the time of Velarde's death, — a catastrophe also frightful, and which, without her being able to explain why, appeared to her now more terrible than it had seemed at first. But to her great surprise the whole day passed, the next day also, and Wednesday likewise, without a single carriage stopping at her door, or a single visitor entering her drawing-rooms; neither did the bear in the vestibule receive a single card in his waiter, nor was there the slightest message, or the most insignificant missive, polite, interested, comforting, or otherwise, left for her. She then became alarmed at this silence, which she could not explain, for she was ignorant of the rumors which had circulated; but when they reached her ears, and she became aware of the fact that a perfidious and mysterious hand had made use of the fatal finding of the cape to cast the suspicion of this crime upon herself, she was seized in her solitude with attacks of anger, trembling-fits like a caged wild beast, and she resolved to defy the calumny to its face by a stroke of energetic audacity.

Chance soon offered her a favorable opportunity. Early Friday morning the notice was brought her that the following day it would be her turn to serve the Queen, as maid of honor at the Palace. This notice was sent, as was customary, by the lady who had acted as maid of honor the day before; and the latter, being a good woman, a simple and pious soul, who rejected the circulating rumors as terrible calumnies, hastened to do her duty by advising Currita,

leaving the initiative to the latter to keep or not to keep the appointment at the Palace. For the first time since the frightful catastrophe, Currita smiled her diabolical little smile, a sure sign that some happy idea had entered her head. Her day to serve fell upon Saturday, and as a result of traditional custom the King and Queen would assist at the *Salve de Atocha*. Curiosity would still attract large throngs of people to see the new Queen, and Currita being present at her side in the first post of honor, it seemed to her that calumny's shafts must be arrested then and there. She well knew the world she frequented, which forms its judgments and regulates its actions by those in power, and she rightly believed that it would be sufficient to present herself once in public by the Queen's side, to make everybody silence their scruples and hasten to preserve her in the post of honor she had always held at Court. Without calling Kate, Currita sprang out of bed before nine o'clock and threw open a window to see the state of the weather. The sun shone brightly, not a cloud could be seen in the sky, and the morning promised a perfect afternoon. Currita felt a sensation of keen joy, which seemed to her a foretaste of triumph; the Court carriages on account of the good weather would be thrown open, and after the Salve they would doubtless have an opportunity to see and contemplate her in her post of honor. She was somewhat dismayed, however, at the prospect of being obliged to pass through the same streets she had taken with Jacob on that fatal night, by the same church before which he had pronounced his last word, and the corner where she had seen him fall with a cry of agony. But what was she to do? Bury herself alive at the age of forty-five? Allow herself, on account of sentimental scruples, to be robbed by calumny of prestige, of supreme sovereignty, and the sceptre of elegance and good form which, in spite of a thousand real disgraces, she had always held in her hand until then?

She laughed at herself for the febrile impatience with which she awaited the hour to go to the Palace, for not even

Lopez Moreno's wife had felt a greater anxiety or a more vehement desire the day of her famous presentation at the Hotel Basilewsky. With redoubled care and exquisite taste, she selected an elegant toilet, with that study of small details peculiar to great geniuses, which accredits in them the practical knowledge of the ground they tread. She donned an elaborate gown of dark-blue velvet, trimmed with chinchilla fur, with hat and wrap to match, two black pearls in her ears and a shamrock upon her breast formed by three pearls, one being white, another black, and the third pink. Upon her left shoulder, fastened with a knot of pink ribbon, she wore the two maid-of-honor crosses, the antique red enamel cross of Queen Isabella, and the M of diamonds and rubies belonging to the new Queen Mercedes. Afterwards, while Kate went to fetch her a dainty lace handkerchief and her suède gloves, she hunted in a little box for a silver relic, which contained a *lignum crucis*. Kissing it with great fervor, she pressed it for an instant to her breast, closing her eyes and bowing her head, as if imploring something of Heaven with great earnestness, and finally put it away in her pocket as she might an amulet possessing the virtue to ward off some danger or injury. Upon ascending the Palace staircase, her heart beat and her limbs trembled, for she had seen two grooms whispering together and looking at her. But when the King's guard at the door of the Saleta gave the blow with the halberd which announces the arrival of a grandee of Spain, Currita's pride awoke, and armed with all her audacity she crossed the antechamber and entered the State Chamber itself, ready to begin the battle, expecting to find there the first lady-in-waiting and the gentleman-in-waiting, or perhaps everybody together. The room, however, was deserted, and Currita felt for a moment the relief of the sick person who sees a dreaded operation postponed an instant on account of the physician's delay. She seated herself upon a bench facing the Royal Chamber to wait until the Queen should summon her, or until some one should come out, but her nervous excitement did not allow

her to rest an instant; she got up again almost immediately, going out upon one of the balconies overlooking the Armory Square. Soon afterwards she began to arrange the little curls upon her forehead before one of the magnificent mirrors, and then became aware of the magnificent portrait of Alfonso XII., painted by Casado, which had been hung there the evening before, and which stood out upon the rich, red silk tapestry embroidered in yellow flowers, with all the glory of a masterpiece.

A quarter of an hour passed, which seemed to her a quarter of a century, and still standing before the portrait she heard the door of the Queen's apartments open behind her; turning quickly, she saw that the door had partly closed again, as if he who had come out had suddenly stopped. She then heard, without being able to distinguish the words, a gentle woman's voice which seemed to speak imploringly as if pleading for something, and then a man's voice, strong and angry, who exclaimed energetically: —

"No! no! this very minute!"

Currita changed color deeply, and put her hand in her pocket, as if seeking the *lignum crucis*. The door again opened, and the majordomo, very much overcome, came towards her. The lady, pretending to be still absorbed in the contemplation of the portrait, turned her head lightly, and waved her hand to him, saying in a little voice, trembling and uncertain in spite of herself: —

"A magnificent portrait! I have never seen it before. When was it hung?"

But the majordomo, without answering her question, and with the effort which a painful duty costs, said to her hesitatingly: —

"The Queen excuses you from service, and has requested me to make known her wish that you return the maid-of-honor cross."

Currita turned rapidly half round, clenching her fists and throwing back her head, as if about to attack the majordomo, fixing upon him the gaze of her enormously wide-open eyes,

which reflected all the anger of one who receives a slap in the face, all the despair of one who sees a last hope crumble to pieces, and all the cunning and impotent menace which characterizes the terror of the weak when annihilated by a stronger hand. Presently, as if the haughty woman within her had suddenly awakened at the contact of an ignominious blow, she tore both crosses from her breast, and threw them upon the floor.

CHAPTER XVI

This terrible blow did not annihilate Currita, neither did it arouse in her that strange sentiment of awe and irritation which, upon the reception of a similar blow at Loyola, had obliged her to feel humbled and ashamed, and to be silent. In Pedro Fernandez's action she had seen the hand of God, which prevented her from profaning His holy house with the scandal of her life; but, in the action of the majordomo she had only seen the King's hand, who, for her, was not an idea, but a man, with whom she could struggle, and whom she could also conquer. But from the first instant she understood only too well, with the rapid perception of her clear understanding and great worldly experience, that she would in vain employ all the *finesse* of her ingenuity, all the power of her money, and all her unrivalled audacity in again attracting her friends about her, or in forming again that brilliant court which was the *medula* of her life, as it was also the *medula* of her vanity. Nothing influences more than the example of a prince, capable in itself alone of saving or ruining the whole of society; and the severe repulse given to Currita at the Palace, just, in spite of its severity, and whose only fault was that it came so late, would certainly influence the whole of Madrid, and would hurl the illustrious lady from the height of her glory, with all the noise of great scandals, and all the fury with which limbs are torn from a fallen tree.

For this reason, without considering herself conquered or relinquishing in the least her arduous undertaking, but steadily strengthening with rage and indignation, and even grief itself, the stubbornness of her spoiled nature, she at once adopted the course of all clever politicians, skilful strategists, and practical connoisseurs of the world and the human heart, — that of a prudent retreat, which would soothe people's minds and give time for memories to forget, for investigations to cease, and for tongues to grow weary; new scandals making them forget and even forgive past offences. She had seen so much of this! Her opportunity, on the other hand, could not be better. Fernandito had reached the state of complete imbecility which softening of the brain causes, and must be taken to Paris, that some medical specialist might there attempt the real miracle of awakening a spark of intelligence in that empty cranium which never had emitted any. The journey was accordingly arranged, and two days previous to setting out, Currita went to the College of Charmartin de la Rosa to take Lili away. The little girl had already completed her twelfth year, and seemed more like an angel ready to fly than a child beginning her life. There was something which reminded one of heaven in her large blue eyes, something candid and intense, as well as calm and sad, which gave to her whole being a certain powerful and sad charm, like that which the innocent smile of an orphan child infuses in the soul. Her mother showered the gentlest of caresses upon her, whispering at the same time that she had brought very good and joyful news for her.

"Can you not guess what it is?"

The child, with her large eyes full of tears and her cheeks suffused with purest blushes, said quickly: —

"Is my papa better? Has he made his confession?"

Currita was completely disconcerted, as she always was by the unexpected sallies of this child. Who would have thought she would remember her father, or be interested in whether they had administered, or not administered, to him that sacrament of which he stood so much in need? She

laughed wonderingly. Bah! It was not that; it was something better still, something concerning herself, — the best thing that could happen to her, and what she was no doubt expecting. And again she wondered, for all the blood in Lili's body now rushed to her face, her little hands shook with a nervous trembling, and she raised towards her mother her eyes brimming over with suppressed eagerness and the sweet hope of hearing what was doubtless her most fervent desire. Her dear little mouth opened a moment, as if to let her secret escape, as a flower exhales its perfume, and again she lowered her eyes in silence, flushing a deeper and deeper crimson, while an ingenuous smile hovered about her lips.

"But, little silly! can't you guess? Why, your school days are over, of course, and I have come to take you away."

Who would have dreamed it? Upon hearing this, the smile faded from the child's lips, like a light suddenly extinguished by a gust of wind; she crossed her little hands in anguish, and gazed at her mother in terror, crying bitterly as if her heart was broken.

"But in Heaven's name, what is the matter, my darling?" exclaimed Currita, stupefied. "Why all this crying? Don't you want to come with me?"

Lili, wiping her eyes with both little hands, said sobbing: —

"Everybody loves me here; all the sisters and the girls."

"But, my darling, are you not loved in your home?" exclaimed Currita, very seriously, and the child hesitating a moment answered with innocent simplicity, in words whose significance she doubtless could not fathom: —

"Paquito is not there now."

Currita felt a pang of anger, which speedily changed into profound grief, the keenest she had ever experienced in the depths of her heart. Her eyes filled with tears; she drew the child to her, took both her hands away from her face, and kissing her upon the forehead, said to her tenderly: —

"We will stop for him on the way, silly one, and we'll all go to Paris together."

The little girl shook her head, slipping down out of her mother's lap, and, trying to control her affliction, as if preparing for battle, said resolutely: —

"And besides, I cannot leave here. No, no, I cannot."

"But why not? You are already a little woman, and here there are only little girls."

"There are women too."

"But, my dearest child; where are these women?"

"The sisters are women."

"You mean you wish to be a nun?" exclaimed Currita, opening wide her eyes; and the young girl, closing hers and nodding energetically, answered firmly: —

"Yes."

"Ah! indeed! Very well. Now I understand," said Currita very gently, with her softest intonation. "And the sisters, the poor dears, as they love you so much, must have put this idea into your head."

"No, no. The sisters have never said anything to me."

"Then it must have been their spiritual adviser, Father Cifuentes."

"No, it was not Father Cifuentes."

"Well, who was it?"

"Paquito."

"Paquito? What an apostle! And why does he not become a monk?"

"That is just what I wrote him; and I sent him the life of St. Stanislaus, and a little picture of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. But he replied that he was most unfortunate, for he had something very important to do in the world. I do not know what it can be."

Currita began to suspect what it might be, and turned very pale; the terrible scene in her studio, when the boy had thrown himself upon Jacob, like a wild beast thirsty for blood, flashed vividly into her mind, making her tremble with fright, infusing into her that species of retrospective terror which a danger past and gone causes, awakening in her soul the prick of remorse and in her heart the grief of a

still bleeding wound. Ah! It would not now be necessary for the poor boy to do this very important thing, for another hand, more guilty than his, had taken the initiative at the corner of Recoletas. Lili, without even dreaming in her angelic simplicity of the effect which these words could have upon her mother, continued: —

"He told me always to be very good, and never to leave the convent, and to pray a lot for him, and for you and papa, for the wrath of God was about to be discharged upon our house. I cried very, very much, and offered then to be a nun, and I told Mother Larin and Father Cifuentes."

"And what did they say?" asked Currita, with white lips.

"Mother Larin burst into tears."

"And the father?"

"He laughed, but consoled me a great deal, and told me not to make any offerings until he should advise me."

Currita became very thoughtful and sat a long time in silence, gazing at the child; suddenly she said: —

"Father Cifuentes thinks a great deal of you, does he not?"

"Oh, yes! he is very good, and likes me very much."

Again she was silent, serious and meditative, for in the midst of this rude upheaval of her feelings, some holy, like mother love, others salutary, like remorse, with which the grace of God stormed her soul, in order to set it afloat, she felt something in the depths of her soul which gradually began to rise, until it floated beneath the surface, and finally swam on top, filling and dominating her whole being. It was her bad angel, the fixed idea and constant thought which cleft her brain like a neuralgic pain, to satisfy her vanity and avenge her indignation by again recovering her old position and the brilliant court of a fashionable woman.

She had suddenly seen an unknown road, a winding path, which led there in a round-about way, and she no longer listened to anything else, nor thought of anything else. Five long minutes she sat silent and motionless, apparently ar-

ranging her plans. Lili, with her little hands crossed upon her knees and her head bent, watched her from time to time through her long lashes, wondering at this strange silence.

Currita finally broke it; this beautiful and precious little darling of hers had affected her, but all this was a very grave and serious matter, and must be thought over and decided slowly and quietly, and not suddenly like this, in a second. For the present she would leave the little girl at the convent, and would break her journey in order to have a talk with Father Cifuentes.

Lili, upon hearing this, jumped impulsively from her chair, and threw herself into her mother's arms, showering kisses upon her, and laughing and crying at the same time, like the rain and sun in an April shower. Currita was somewhat moved, and shed a few tears.

"It is nothing, my darling; you must have judgment and must beg of God that he will enlighten us all. And now, my precious child, tell Mother Larin I wish to speak to her a moment. Eh! darling? Only for a moment; tell her yourself, dear."

Mother Larin came in very much alarmed, fearing some scene, and Currita, with a pathetic gesture, threw herself weeping into her arms. That day was the greatest of her life; at last God had granted her what she had always prayed for so earnestly; that her daughter should be a religious. True, it cut her to the heart, and might perhaps cost her her life to be separated from the dear little thing, but what she regretted was not having seven children like St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, that she might offer them to God one by one. The world was so wicked! Mother Larin, very much scandalized upon seeing St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi suddenly made the mother of such a numerous family, hastened to protest very respectfully: —

"Your Ladyship doubtless means Saint Symphorosa."

"Was it Saint Symphorosa? I really thought it was the other; as I read the 'Christian Year' every day, I sometimes make some stupid blunders. But tell me, Mother

Larin, do you believe my daughter will persevere, and that her vocation is genuine?"

The mother raised her eyebrows, and with much humility answered: —

"The child is of a very serious nature, and from what I can infer, I hope so. But it would be very much better if you would speak to our spiritual director on the subject."

"Who is he?"

"Father Cifuentes."

"Father Cifuentes? Really? How delighted I am. He is a saint, and a man of so much wisdom and prudence."

"You are indeed right; consult him and you will see."

"But I do not know him. Ah! Mother Larin, will you not write him a little note, *deux mots*, as a letter of introduction? Tell him what my wishes are, what I desire for my children, and the good faith with which I proceed. In this way he will listen to me kindly. You know me well, Mother Larin. I am so unfortunate. Every one has such a false idea of me!"

And Currita, convinced herself of what she said, which is generally the case with professional impostors, extended her hands and opened wide her light eyes, that Mother Larin might read her very soul, and concluded by bursting into a bitter flood of weeping, covering her face with her handkerchief. The mother very much pleased, and believing that this stray sheep again wished to enter the fold, tried to console her and promised to write that very night to Father Cifuentes, informing him of her intended visit.

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Mother Larin, and will never forget you as long as I live!" moaned Currita. "For do not imagine this affair of my poor Lili's will be exempt from difficulties. Fernandito is very good, but nevertheless, man-like, is not as pious as we women, and will look upon all this in a very different light." And now affectionately taking leave of the good mother, she repeated:

"Do not forget, Mother, the essential thing. To make the father understand the sincerity with which I proceed in

everything, and the rectitude of my intentions!" And then quickly turning back on the threshold of the room, as if suddenly remembering something, she said: —

"Ah! Mother Larin, I had nearly forgotten! I do not know whether I told Lili or not, for with this news everything else has flown out of my head. I hear you are having a new altar made for Holy Thursday, and I wish it to be at my expense. I desire very much to make this offering in Lili's name, and that she shall give this small tribute to the convent."

"Thank you, very, very much indeed, your Ladyship."

"Thanks? Ah! Mother Larin, what a world, what a world! Would to God money was only spent in such things!"

She entered her carriage. Really this idea must have come from Heaven, for it was Lili, one of God's angels, who had inspired it. It was only strange it had never occurred to her before, for in that letter from Loyola it was clearly revealed in the first part, "If the Countess of Albornoz comes to Loyola to confess her sins and beg pardon of God for her follies, it will not be necessary to appoint either hour or day, for all are equally convenient." And palliating the words in her imagination, she ruminated in this manner: —

"If the Countess of Albornoz goes to Loyola, that is to say, to Father Cifuentes, confesses her sins, and begs pardon of God for her follies, or what is equivalent, deceives that worthy man by telling him what she thinks best, and withholding all she deems necessary in order to win his confidence, — in the shadow of his respectability and clinging to his cassock, she can enter the ranks of aristocratic devotees, and thus gain, rosary in hand, through the short cut of piety, the high position from which calumny and ingratitude have hurled her."

To do this, it was not necessary to commit a sacrilege, which had always terrified her, and still terrified her. She only wished to do what was absolutely necessary: to confess well, accuse herself of all her sins, and enumerate all her

follies. What did it matter to her if Father Cifuentes knew what had even been published in the papers, and which she had read without a blush? If there had been any sacrifice to make, or any ties to break, it would be a different thing; but death and an assassin's dagger had taken upon themselves to make the sacrifice and break the ties, and there was no longer anything left her, nothing indeed except the wound in her heart, and the indignation in her soul. And before these two ideas which exasperated her, Jacob dead, and herself fallen from her pedestal, she felt her blood boil with grief and anger; the first seemed to her the most heinous crime ever perpetrated in the universe, and the second a more atrocious act of tyranny than could ever be attributed to Nero, Tiberius, or Busiris.

With a certain feeling of trepidation, natural and well-founded, she went to call upon Father Cifuentes, for the father had the reputation of being very shrewd. But her sudden decision, though a woman's caprice, was as solid as a man's resolution, and she was partly tranquillized by the intimate consciousness that few could outwit her in astuteness and cunning. With consummate cleverness she unfolded her plan, beginning by expounding Lili's vocation, which was the desire of her heart, and sweet hope of her soul, and which she would support with all her strength, although she might have to struggle against the serious difficulties which Fernandito would oppose. A clever stroke, this last, which the sly Countess inserted now to be able to fall back upon and make use of it later on, to destroy the young girl's holy plans, once her own object was attained.

The Jesuit, impassive, listened to her with his hands in his sleeves, from time to time gazing at her with looks as sharp as steel, which made Currita avert her own eyes, either by lowering them or glancing about the room. When the lady ceased speaking, Father Cifuentes produced the horn snuff-box and green and yellow handkerchief with heraldic squares, saying resolutely and as if it was the most natural thing in the world: —

"Your Ladyship's daughter has no vocation."

Currita was completely stupefied and disconcerted, and shaking her small head stammered: —

"But she told me so; I believed — "

"You believed wrongly, Lady Countess. The child is an angel, of brightest intelligence and large and upright heart, but she is terrified by her brother's letters, which cut her to the soul, your Ladyship, to the very soul." And the two little arrows in Father Cifuentes' eyes pierced Currita's forehead through and through, as if to lodge in the depths of her thoughts.

"For this reason," continued the Jesuit, slowly, "the poor child wished to make the sacrifice of her life to secure the salvation of the rest, and to expiate the faults of others, for which she grieves as the angels of heaven grieve, bewailing them, but without laying the blame upon any one; and mark well what I say, your Ladyship, without blaming any one." The Countess lowered her eyes modestly as if not knowing whether or not she was the one to blame, and the father continued: —

"But as you must understand, this sacrifice of incalculable price, whose idea I have encouraged for what is useful and meritorious in it, and because the offering alone may perhaps be sufficient to obtain from God what the poor child asks, is not a religious vocation, but an offering only, which in her affliction and generosity the child makes; but, while God does not accept it, the true vocation does not exist, and I, for my part, until then can neither advise nor authorize it."

"It seems we are only beginning the conversation," thought Currita, without altogether understanding these subtle and mysterious allusions; and turning over and over in her hands an exquisite prayer-book, which she had bought on purpose to show her piety to the father, she said modestly: —

"And what do you, then, believe is best to be done?"

"Let God's grace work; perhaps he will concede her, as a

reward, the vocation which as yet she does not possess; and meanwhile do not take her away from the convent."

"Do you not think, then, that it would be well for her to return to her home?"

Father Cifuentes opened the snuff-box, and with the impassibility of a man who speaks to a deaf person, and the simplicity with which he would have said it is warm or cold, he said calmly: —

"No, your Ladyship. The example set in it would not perhaps succeed in corrupting her, but it would certainly succeed in killing her."

Currita did not protest against this tremendous reproach; neither was she ashamed or indignant. On the contrary, she took advantage of this crushing remark to attain her object, and said dolefully: —

"Ah! yes, yes, Father, you are right! If you only knew all that has happened to my house! and the situation in which I find myself!" And adopting the most clever *modus operandi* in the art of dissimulation, that of affecting ingenuousness, and disguising her intentions with simplicity and frankness, she truthfully related to Father Cifuentes the scandal of her life, Jacob's tragic death, the calumny circulated by those invisible enemies, her helplessness to accuse them or defend herself in Court, and the need she had of some worthy person, some one authorized by his holiness and prestige to work for her, to pardon her real faults and defend her from false crimes; some one who would offer her his protection and friendship, reinstating her by this action alone in the eyes of the world. And she did not ask this for herself, who deserved nothing, as she now confessed, but besought it through charity, pity, and compassion for her children.

Currita ceased speaking, and with her head bowed, hands crossed, and small eyes askance, devoutly awaited the formidable sermon and tremendous reproof which she believed would follow all this, with some violent exhortation to confession and penitence, and perhaps some few touches of hell-

fire, resulting finally in that which she desired and sought with so much eagerness, a generous offer, noble, sincere, and bounteous. But Father Cifuentes, who had listened without blinking to all this accumulation of shame and horror, and who had not made the slightest gesture of amazement, disgust, compassion, or protest, produced his horn snuff-box, took a pinch, and said laconically: —

"Are you making the retreat?"

"The retreat?" she asked, very much surprised.

"Yes, the retreat of St. Ignatius. The exercises began yesterday at the Sacred Heart Convent in the Calle Caballero de Gracia. You still have time; they resume again this afternoon."

"I — very well — of course," said Currita, stammering. "But from what I can understand, one can enter there only by invitation, and I have none."

"In that case I will give you a letter of introduction to the Superioress, and will speak to the Marchioness of Villasis, who is the President of the Council."

Currita felt such a sensation of joy that she nearly betrayed herself. At last she had triumphed, and in spite of his impassibility, and notwithstanding his shrewdness, she had made the blessed father swallow the whole bait. Between the Marchioness of Villasis, the lady who boasted the best reputation in the Court, and Father Cifuentes, the priest of greatest prestige, she would make her triumphal *entrée* into this assemblage of aristocratic pious women, and there among them, once she had taken root, would soon reconquer little by little their applause and adulation, and so reinstate herself again in her old lost position.

She dressed herself simply, but not without that lavish attention to small details which vulgar tastes depreciate, and which those privileged and practised in the art of dress set such a value on; a modest black silk skirt, and velvet wrap trimmed with fur; her mantilla, entirely thrown back from the shoulders, was most gracefully arranged, the lace edges covering part of her face, but perfectly revealing her little

red locks, her characteristic feature, which, with most prudent forethought, she took good care to leave exposed, so in case of darkness or doubt no one might fail to recognize her.

The holy exercises began at five o'clock, and at seven minutes past she timed well her entrance, that she might be seen by all. Alighting from her carriage, she entered the vestibule, expecting to find there some religious or portress of whom she could ask for the Marchioness of Villasis, or Father Cifuentes; but she only saw before her a long flight of stairs, divided in the middle by an iron railing, which served as a balustrade. At the top of these, two ladies were whispering together, very softly, but upon seeing Currita ascending the stairs broke off abruptly, and quickly disappeared, before the lady had time to recognize them. She now found herself in front of the door of the chapel, which was wide open; the latter was long, wide, and vast, with a large door at the back, which communicated with the interior of the convent, and another side-door for the use of the people. In front was the altar, simply adorned, with several lights burning to right and left of the tabernacle. High above it was a beautiful image of the Sacred Heart, and hanging from the base of it, to the floor, was a long brocaded curtain of red velvet, upon which was embroidered the words, *Venite ad me omnes*. On either side of the large door at the back were the nuns' kneeling-stools, occupied at the moment by the ladies of the Council. The Marchioness of Villasis was in the right hand corner, with the Duchess of Astorga by her side.

Currita saw from the door an empty seat at the end of a bench, and here she knelt, making one of those hieroglyphics with which certain ladies pretend to cross themselves, clasping her small hands on the back of the bench in front of her and bowing her head most devoutly, at the same time taking in, out of the corner of her eye, everything and everybody in the chapel. Marvellous perspicacity and magnetic influence of a feminine congregation! Four

minutes later, there was not a single more or less pious soul in the vast precinct of the chapel who was not aware of Currita's presence; a few soft whispers, or furtive looks and signs being all that was necessary for it. A prayer-book or rosary accidentally falling upon the floor gave to the lady who dropped it an opportunity to cast a rapid glance about her with the greatest innocence. There she was, heroically bearing all these glances and guessing at the internal comments which accompanied them. The Countess of Murguia, a very sedate woman, who had dined innumerable Fridays at Currita's house, and often enjoyed her box at the opera, was seated next to her. She was alarmed at this proximity and turned her head despairingly, squeezing up as much as possible against the other ladies who filled the bench, hastening to leave between herself and the outcast a large empty space. Currita, without losing her devotion, felt like tearing her eyes out.

Shortly afterwards a lady came in with two young girls, evidently her daughters, and one of them, the youngest, knelt down by Currita in the empty space; but her mother, warned no doubt by another lady, who whispered to her, arose promptly, touched the young girl on the shoulder and withdrew her from the place. Currita did not feel angry this time, she felt a pained and bitter sensation, until then unknown to her, which seemed like the grief she might feel at finding herself abandoned or forsaken by a loved one; for the young girl had reminded her of Lili.

Other ladies came in, the chapel was filled to its utmost, and the late comers squeezed in among those who had arrived first, no one wishing to occupy the vacant seat next to Currita. The latter felt this affliction increase; it oppressed and tormented her, and produced in her a silent irritation and bitter anger, which led her to investigate, full of rage, the scandals of her life, seeking and enumerating her shameful public actions, known to all, which had been tolerated, approved of, and even applauded as amiable trifles by this same Madrid, which had now given her the cold

shoulder, throwing it all up to her, and which made her exclaim with most excellent logic: "Am I any worse now than I was before? Is it possible an anonymous calumny, circulated by perfidious assassins, has more effect on you, than this heap of mud which has bespattered your faces on all occasions? Oh! what a world! So unjust and so loathsome! And Lili, that angel of the Lord so pure and beautiful, how right she was to shrink from entering it!"

At this thought, with the rapidity with which scenes are shifted in a magic comedy, the image of this Madrid so unjust and loathsome, which provoked her anger, was replaced by Lili's celestial figure, diffusing a brilliant heavenly light, which illuminated and took possession of her whole understanding, vividly contrasting with the heap of repulsive and fetid mud, the filthy and miry swamp which she had just evoked with such fury, by making a general examination of her whole life.

It seemed to Currita that she was looking at a sewer by the pure and rosy light of dawn, or that she was gazing at the infernal regions by the light of Paradise, and she felt herself confounded and condemned; for this heap of mud was herself, and that splendor surrounding Lili was God's light, the only moral criterion, independent of miserable social condescensions, by which human acts should be adjusted. A last feeling of pride stirred within her.

"I am infamous, it is true! But let God judge me, and not man!" And upon raising her eyes, furious and desperate, as if to cast about her a look of proud defiance, she saw in front of her the image of Christ, the only Judge her conquered pride accepted, showing her his wounded heart, and saying in those words embroidered at its base, *Venite ad me omnes.*[1] A mysterious twinge rent her breast, and she murmured softly: —

"*Omnes!* All, all!"

Meanwhile the rosary had been said, and a Jesuit father at this moment ascended the pulpit in order to expound

[1] "Come all unto me." — Tr.

the meditation for that day, according to the order established in the Exercises of St. Ignatius. It was on the Last Judgment and was divided into three parts: the confusion of hypocrites upon seeing their hidden sins revealed; the supreme shame of scandal-makers, upon seeing the public sins of which they had boasted the object of universal execration; and the justification of Providence, the clear manifestation of the mysterious ways ordained by God, always for man's good, that omniscient network of great events and small incidents, of joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeats, pleadings and threats, rewards and punishments, which will then be revealed, and will prove in the life of every creature, under the search-light of that dreadful day, the paternal Providence of God for every human being, and the perfect harmony of his two great attributes, the most dreaded and the most desired, justice and mercy over each and every one of us. The Jesuit spoke with simplicity, clearly expounding these tremendous truths, and outlining at times frightful pictures which affected the imagination of all his listeners, touched their hearts, and prepared their souls for the future echo of those fearful words: —

"Ossa arida, audite verbum Domini!"[1]

A profound silence reigned, like the silence of terror, and the Jesuit, slightly changing the thread of his discourse, suddenly disclosed the infinite goodness of God, the most consoling of all his attributes, his unbounded mercy, always holding out to the repentant sinner a pardon so liberal and so boundless that the most heinous sins are consumed in it like atoms.

"Imagine," he said, "a man who has reached the limit of crime; charge your minds with all the ignominious actions it is possible to conceive. See him sleep tranquilly in the midst of his shame, and on the brink of the grave, as if he no longer had a conscience, or felt remorse. But one day, just as in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, a stone rolling

[1] "Dry bones, hear ye the word of the Lord!" — Tr.

down the mountain-side shattered into atoms the colossal idol with clay feet, so also an atom, wrung from God's mercy by the prayers of a pure soul, will demolish without any apparent cause this colossal heap of evil, and will form in this despairing mind a tear, which, rising to the heart, will pass through the ways which God has ordained, until it reaches his dried-up eyes, gushing from them, and rolling down his cheeks. This tear will have revealed to him the truth, obtained for him pardon, and restored to him peace!"

And as if this blessed tear, obtained by the prayers of a pure soul, was formed at this moment in a certain breast, and rising to this heart, gushed from the eyes with a formidable explosion of grief, the profound silence was broken by a sob which resounded throughout the entire chapel, making the Jesuit cease speaking an instant; and the ladies, pale and overwhelmed, glanced at each other as they saw the Countess of Albornoz sink down upon the kneeling-stool, annihilated like a grain of seed ground in a mill, biting her hands to control, as by a superhuman effort she did control, the cries, sobs, and moans of pain, which seethed within her breast, but which found no vent through her lips. The sermon came to an end, and immediately afterwards was intoned that exquisite hymn and pathetic cry of the repentant sinner "Perdon, Ó Dios mio;" and the numerous congregation filed out before Currita, who neither raised her head nor stirred, as if the shame of her whole life held her there bound and subject before the curious, compassionate, and even scornful glances of her old rivals. The chapel was deserted, and a lay-sister who glided about like a shadow, extinguished the lights one by one, the Countess of Albornoz neither moving from her seat nor giving signs of life. A pair of arms encircled her at last, in that solitude in which God alone was witness, and a voice deeply moved spoke to her in almost a whisper: —

"Curra, daughter, my carriage is below; shall I take you with me?"

She raised her head and fixed upon the one who thus

spoke to her a stupefied and fearful look, which seemed to have no consciousness of reality, and which reflected as in two deep mirrors unbounded terror and agony. She finally recognized the Marchioness of Villasis, and the face of the sinner, crimson with shame for the first time in her life, hid itself upon the chaste breast of the stronger woman, stammering between sobs: —

"Yes! yes! Take me where no one will see me; to Charmartin with my daughter."

The young girl was not surprised to see her. That afternoon, by the advice of Father Cifuentes, she had offered to God the sacrifice of her life, and was awaiting her mother, confident and serene, as the angels await the tears of a sinner.

CHAPTER XVII

It has been said that a beggar cavils more at things than a hundred lawyers; but there is one who cavils more than a beggar and a hundred lawyers put together, — any lazy school-boy glued to a bench, with a book before him. On this particular day, in the study-hall of the college at Guichon, Alfonsito Tellez-Ponce, alias Tapon, found himself in this predicament. Full of roguishness, but with the heart of an angel, mischief-loving as only he knew how to be, he was the idol and constant temptation of his companions, the fascination and perpetual torment of his teachers. His designs, however, could not have been better on this morning, nor his intentions more upright. On the following day the reverend rector's birthday was to be celebrated by a famous excursion to the country and sea-shore near Biarritz, and the wretched Tapon, condemned by three or four different sentences of punishment to perpetual seclusion, made up his mind, by paying strict attention for a whole day, to gain a general dispensation from his imprisonment, and the suspen-

sion of the ten or twelve trials which, for different infractions, breaches, and infringements of the law, awaited him before the prefect's tribunal. He accordingly arose with a bound at the first sound of the bell, washed himself without spilling a drop of water, and without mishap he fell quickly into line and went to the chapel, where he heard mass as devoutly as any St. Louis Gonzaga. So far so good; but upon leaving the sacred spot, the spirit of mischief turned a somersault within him, and without being able to help himself, he pulled the boy who walked ahead of him in the orderly file by his coat. In the study-hall he said the daily offering with much devotion, filliped his neighbor to the right, from force of habit, threw his left-hand neighbor's books on the floor, almost by a necessity of his temperament, and opened the top of his desk with much formality. He was about to begin to study, and not indiscriminately either. He had concluded his rhetorical studies the year before, had assisted at the taking of Troy and the foundation of Rome, had drunk with Horace in the cascades of the Tiber, admired the bees with Virgil, saved a republic with Cicero, and declaimed in the public squares of Greece with Demosthenes. During the present year he would devote himself to the sublime science of mathematics, and had already obtained by order of his professor, the circumference of the neighboring belfry, with only an error of nearly two kilometres. To-day he proposed nothing less than to determine the radius of a sphere, and with great diligence took out his text-book, his box of compasses, and the clean white paper, upon which the important experiment was to be made. Father Bonnat, the study-hall inspector, glanced at him from his high tribunal, amazed at so much diligence, imagining he beheld the conversion of St. Augustine or the transformation of Saul into Paul. With a rapid stroke of the compass Tapon drew a neat and perfect circle, like a full moon. It was magnificent and as round as the earth! It looked like a face, exactly like a face, identical with that of Mme. Dous, the shop-keeper, who sold sausages at the gates of Bayonne. What a coinci-

dence! Tapon marked with much dexterity two dots from which to take the radius with which to trace two cross curves, and he was confirmed in his opinion. Those two little dots were unquestionably the perfect image of Mme. Dous's eyes, round, small and wide-awake. The likeness was perfect. The only thing lacking was the little bow on top of her head, and that no detail might be omitted, Tapon painted one on the upper part of the circle. He then drew a nose at the point where the two foiled curves should have crossed, sketched in a mouth with a downy upper lip, and finally added two ears with rings, so that in less than a quarter of an hour, Mme. Dous's visage had replaced the circle. Satisfied with his experiment, he showed it to his two neighbors. A stealthy hand emerged from behind him and snatched out of his own hand the masterpiece. Great Heavens! Tapon, frightened, turned quickly round, and found himself face to face with Father Bonnat. A splendid opportunity to present him his petition for a general dispensation!

"Is this the way you prepare your studies, Master Tapon?" asked the minister of justice, in a stern voice. And Master Tapon, overwhelmed but with much dignity, answered, with his hand on his breast, that it had been done unconsciously, in a moment of distraction, and without his being able to help it.

"Well, without your being able to help it, you will go to-day without dessert, and to-morrow of course without the picnic."

Tapon, crushed, burst into tears, pushed the text-book to the left and the box of compasses to the right, and leaning his head upon both hands, soon became absorbed, despite his tears, in the contemplation of the inkstand before him. A fly was crawling on the edge of it, thrusting out from time to time its delicate feelers, and making its dark and transparent wings vibrate with the motion of its little hind-feet. The fly seemed to be meditating, and the idea occurred to Tapon to catch it as a distraction to his grief. He moist-

ened the tips of his thumb and index finger with saliva, and extended his hand cautiously; the unwary fly hopped from the inkstand and alighted on the traitorous hand, started on an exploring expedition around it, and finally approached the fatal trap. Tapon pressed his fingers and caught it by the feet. The fly protested indignantly, batting its wings with a certain pitiful buzzing.

"Presa en estrecho lazo
La codorniz sencilla
Daba quejas al viento
Ya tarde arrepentida."

"The simple quail,
A prisoner in a fatal trap,
Sent up its wails to the wind,
But too late repentant."

Tapon, inexorable, resolved to convert it into the instrument of his vengeance; he took a fine piece of tissue paper and wrote upon it "Death to Father Bonnat!" and twisting one end of it into a sharp point, stuck it in the prisoner's back, he then opened his hand and the fly spread its wings in flight, dragging the long tail behind it like a bird of Paradise. Tapon's delight was unbounded; he had realized the theory of the messenger doves. He set to work and in less than ten minutes more than a dozen flies were circling about the room, carrying from part to part the destructive cry of "Death to Father Bonnat!" The sedition soon became universal in the vast study-hall, imitators and even reformers being found in abundance. One wrote upon little slips of red paper "Long live liberty." Another, more irreverent, wrote "Down with the Jesuits!" and a third, the son of an emigrant, destroyed a box of bonbons in order to print upon thin blue paper the retrogressive cry of "Long live Charles III.!"

There was a general manifestation of personal sympathies and political opinions, there not being one among these statesmen, capable of governing the country of Liliput, who

did not make known his views by means of these novel messenger doves. Only Paco Lujan, bending over his desk, although not much engrossed in the book before him, contented himself with glancing occasionally at the flight of the messenger doves, smiling benevolently, but without taking part in the clandestine sport. Seated behind him was an older boy of the Malay type, with a narrow forehead and a sneaking expression of envy, who had had many quarrels with Paquito and had suffered more than once from the blows of his powerful fists. With much precaution he wrote a long sentence upon a piece of cigarette paper, fastening it according to the Tapon system to a very large fly, and, first looking suspiciously about him, threw it with all his might at Paco's head. The fly soared for a moment in the air, but overcome by the weight of the long tail, finally alighted on the shoulder of the boy in front of Paquito. The latter laughed upon seeing it and quickly extending his hand, caught it by the paper. The fly spread its wings, leaving its vexatious appendage in the boy's hands. The poor little fellow, delighted with his find, began to read the contents of the missive. His joy suddenly disappeared, however, and he became livid upon deciphering it, turning quickly half-way round in his seat, as if some one had applied a red-hot iron to him, and fixing a look of ferocious hatred and unbounded rage upon the inoffensive Tapon, who in a state of great exhilaration had just thrown into the air his sixteenth cry of, "Death to Father Bonnat!"

Behind them both, the Malay watched with malignant curiosity this mute scene, which was both infantile and terrible. Paco Lujan slowly turned his head again, burying it in both hands as if crushed. Trembling with rage he dug his finger-nails into his flesh, and two tears, such as are rarely shed at the age of fifteen, gushed from his eyes and coursed down his cheeks; anger instantly dried them as a drop of water is dried by the simoon of a desert. He had read on that slip of paper a gross jest, in which his mother's name was insidiously mixed with Jacob's, and which was

signed by the son of that detested man, the same Alfonsito Tellez, the inoffensive Tapon, and rose-colóred imp of Satan, as the rector of the college called him, an expression at one and the same time of his angelic innocence and naughty deviltry. What an unexpected and horrible blow! The boy, accustomed from the long and silent suffering of his short life to hide his feelings, controlled himself again, swallowing his rancor and his tears. An hour afterwards, when the bell called the alumni to their classes, Paco Lujan showed no signs of having heard it, still sitting motionless in his seat, with his head between his hands and no other signs of life than the frequent nervous shudders which shook his whole frame. Father Bonnat thought he was asleep, and took his hands down from his face; he then saw his flushed forehead, and his brilliant and staring eyes, and felt his burning hands.

"What is the matter, my son? Are you ill? Have you a fever?"

"No, no, there is nothing the matter," replied the boy, with a forced smile, and tearing himself brusquely away from the father he ran to his class-room.

Never was there a more joyous awakening than that of the Guichon College boys the following morning. It was like the awakening of the birds, when on a May morning they fly from their nests at the first stroke of dawn, and pour forth their noisy, exhilarating, and communicative joy through the foliage of the trees, like a cascade of ecstatic trills, which move one to the soul, and awaken in one's heart peace, consolation, and placid gratitude towards God. The joyful college band replaced on this day the severe clanging of the bells which ordinarily aroused the alumni from the sound sleep of childhood to involve them in the small vexations, for them immense, of a student's life. A hundred loud hurrahs for the rector at once mingled with the sounds of the music, and joy reigned supreme; the boisterous life which overflowed in these little bodies suddenly inundating dormitories, hallways, and the entire college, being checked

only at the door of the chapel by one of those rapid changes, incredible in children, which prove the immense power of discipline, and the irresistible force which is exercised upon every multitude by the authority which knows how to make itself respected and loved. A profound silence reigned within the chapel; they all heard mass devoutly, and afterwards breakfasted lightly. There was now a moment of general expectation and painful suspense.

The prefect, the dreaded executor of severe justice, now came in, and called Tapon and six other unfortunates before him. Consternation was pictured in all faces, and while the guilty ones, pale and contrite, took their places to the left, there was noticeable among the others that excitement which is always the precursor in great multitudes of either heroic or desperate resolutions. A plump little fellow now advanced from the lines and, red as a beet, approached the rector, who had just entered the room, and said to him with heroic magnanimity: —

"Please let the boys off, reverend Father, and let them go to the picnic; I will stay in their places."

An exclamation of enthusiasm greeted the self-abnegation of the hero, and the rector, extending his hand with an imposing gesture, said gravely: —

"You, sir lawyer of lost cases, will go to the picnic this very minute; and these seven young gentlemen will leave my sight instantly —" Here the rector raised his hand as if about to inflict the avenging blow of justice, and continued with extreme severity, "— by going to the picnic also."

The rector's severity then melted in a happy burst of laughter, and a deafening chorus of bravos greeted the proclamation. Caps were thrown enthusiastically into the air, while the pardoned culprits and the generous intercessor were carried away in triumph with fraternal affection. They all began their march across the flowery meadows and green fields, through dense forests, and by picturesque little country houses, surrounded by gardens which were dotted along the entire route from Guichon to the sea; the latter,

lying behind Biarritz, dashed with fury against the rocks, menacing and imposing beneath its limpid blue surface and undulating motion, like an expression of terrible anger upon the face of a serene divinity.

Further along the Basque coast, upon a high and secluded table-land formed by the rocks, and not far from a certain delightful villa, the gay and happy throng called a halt, in order to pitch their tents, lunch, and rest. Their provisions were substantial, and their appetites excellent, and seated upon the ground in groups of ten or twelve, the children began that delicious feast, to which the sea-air lent its invigorating breezes, the sunlight its warmth, and the joy of childhood its loquacity. Their inspectors kept an eye on them, going about from group to group, taking part in their conversations, encouraging their jokes and laughter, and preventing by their presence all excesses, without at all putting a damper on the effusive joy of the children. On one of his rounds Father Bonnat stumbled across Paco Lujan, seated Turkish fashion in one of the largest groups. The boy was preoccupied and silent, with his napkin folded and plate untouched before him; one of his companions instantly denounced him.

"Father! Lujan is not eating!"

The latter turned quickly and with forced joviality answered: —

"I am not eating? Just see if I 'm not! Look!"

And with a single gulp, scarcely drawing a breath, he drained a glass full of wine to the very dregs; from that time on he was gay, talkative, and jocose, and rising suddenly began to look about him as if seeking for something. The meal was now over, and joy was at its height; the children dispersed in different directions, all taking part in various sports. On the top of a rock sitting astride a projecting ledge, Tapon, in his shirt-sleeves, armed with an abandoned rod with a long line, was laboriously fishing. Lujan approached him from behind, and resting a hand on his shoulder said to him in a strange voice: —

"Tapon! come here!"

The latter raised his eyes, and at the sight of that pale face and frowning brow, quickly changed color. He immediately dropped the rod, put his jacket on in silence, and arose with docility.

"Walk ahead," said Paco.

A little path, cut in the rock itself and flanked on both sides by jutting peaks and large boulders, led from the summit of the rock to the sea-beaten coast beneath. By it both boys began to descend, Alfonso surprised and frightened, his companion pale and frowning, both unconsciously being drawn on by the most pitiful of misfortunes which exists on earth, that brought upon the innocent by the faults of the guilty. When they reached the wildest part of the coast, where the rocks stood out solitary, and the noise of the sea was deafening and terrifying, where the joyous shouts of the children could no longer be heard, nor was there further trace of man, Tapon, full of uneasiness, turned and looked timidly at his companion; but the latter pushing him forward said: —

"Go ahead; are you afraid?"

The little path terminated in a small table-land surrounded on all sides by rocks, which were completely submerged in the high tide water, and against which the waves dashed, sending up seething masses of white foam, and leaving exposed upon receding, on the declivity of the land, a small hollow like a well, full of water, which reached to the waists of both children. Tapon stood still, leaning against the largest rock which impeded all further progress; and again becoming very pale and frightened, with the mortal anguish of uncertainty and the husky voice of fear he said in almost a whisper: —

"What do you want?"

The other, now giving a loose rein to the rage which was choking him, and to his hatred for the father of this innocent, now beyond his reach, which for so many years he had fostered within his breast with the patience of one

sharpening the blade of a knife, cried out in a terrible voice, shaking him with one hand by the arm, and holding the closed fist of his other hand to his very face: —

"What do I want? I want to kill you! To tear your heart out and throw you in the sea. Only one of us must return to the college."

And drawing out of his pocket the fatal paper, torn from the fly the day before, he spread it before Tapon's eyes, dilated with terror, and again cried out, livid with anger: —

"Do you recognize this?"

The boy fixed his eyes for a moment upon this strange bit of paper, which shook from the angry trembling of the hand that held it, while the modesty of his innocent soul had strength to crimson for an instant the blue pallor of fright which overspread his cheeks. He shook his head and closed his eyes, turning them away.

"That is wicked," he said; "it is a sin."

"A sin, and you wrote it!" screamed the other, in the paroxysm of his rage. And with a terrible blow he knocked him down, his full length upon the ground, immediately throwing himself upon him with cries of fury, hurling at the father, and mother, and the boy himself, the most horrible insults, which seemed to swell in his throat, as if there was not room enough to cast them forth, giving him blow after blow with his fists, kicking him all over his body, tearing his hair and knocking his head against the rocks, until, exhausted and panting, he suddenly saw his hands stained with blood. He then receded a step, pale and sick, instantly experiencing what all generous hearts feel when the horrible vertigo of vengeance is spent, and they see their victim, defenceless and annihilated, stretched at their feet. A great wave of mercy towards this poor boy, upon whom he had tried, without altogether succeeding, to concentrate the unbounded hatred which he professed for his father, now invaded his heart and awakened his reason, and in a hushed, almost tender voice, he held out to him his own handkerchief, saying: —

"Tapon! you are bleeding!"

The boy tried to rise, moaning pitifully and repeating with an unmistakable accent of truth: "I did not write it! It was not I!" And with a heartrending expression of pain, as if his soul suffered more than his wounded body from the insults he had heard against his father and mother, he reiterated pitifully: —

"My father is dead, — I never knew him; but my mother is a saint. Do you understand? — a saint!"

Paco Lujan felt his whole heart melt in tears, and he hastened to support the boy, who seemed ready to swoon; he had a cut on his forehead from which the blood flowed profusely, trickling down his face and staining his shirt. He assisted him to rise, supporting him under the arms, and dragged him gently away, in order to wash his wound, towards the well which the receding waves left exposed at the foot of a rock on the very brink of the sea. The boy with perfect confidence allowed himself to be led away, his livid little head, white as snow, resting on Paco's shoulder. The latter now found he had forgotten the handkerchief, which lay higher up, on the scene of the combat, and he hastened back to look for it. Tapon meanwhile, sick and dizzy after this rude shaking up, and barely conscious, leaned too far over the rock and rolled to the brink of the sea. An immense wave which broke on the shore at that moment seized him with its jaws of foam, swallowing him up in its tremendous surf. Lujan gave a most horrible cry, incomprehensible in a child, and stood with his hair on end, and his arms rigid and extended towards that immense wave, which swept from the world an innocent boy, in fulfilment of a tremendous act of God's justice. His dreadful stupor lasted only a moment. He knew how to swim, and would save him, — yes, would save him, even though he might have to dive into the depths of the sea, or dash his brains out against the rocks of the deep, struggling single-handed with terror and death. He tore off his clothes, throwing them aside, and giving vent to strange cries from his panting and oppressed breast, laden with the frightful

burden of horror as he made his way across the rocks, and left upon them without feeling it, pieces of skin torn from his bare legs. He gained the summit of the highest rock, the most projecting and inclined towards the abyss, and clinging to the end of it, tearing his flesh against the rough edges of the peak, he strained his eyes, seeking in that vast expanse of waters for a signal, or black speck, even a slight splashing on the surface of the water. Nothing! Nothing! — nothing more than the waves so blue and beautiful, in spite of such a frightful catastrophe, and the sky so pure and radiant as if oblivious of the horror beneath it.

"Great God! Blessed Mother of Sorrows! Let me find him! I'll give my life in exchange! I do not hate him; I love him, — I love even his father. My God! pardon! I am sorry! He was good! My mother was the wicked one, — she, she!"

He arose rigid and stiff as a corpse, his figure seeming to grow to more than half its height. Yonder, afar off, about twenty fathoms from the rocks, the water stirred a little, forming small eddies, while a black speck appeared. Yes, yes, there was no doubt. Blessed Heaven! It was a little clenched hand begging for help. Like a flash, an arc was described in the air and another victim was buried in the sea, with a cry for mercy which his memory found in the earliest recollections of his childhood, and which the Queen of Angels placed upon his lips as a pledge of pardon in that supreme hour: —

> "Oh! Virgin of Sorrowful Remembrance,
> Wilt thou remember me?"

He swam the distance with the energy and desperation of agony, dived beneath the water once, and again swam on top, dived the second time, and once more there appeared on the surface, not one, but two little heads, both together, one light, the other dark. They disappeared again, creating a small whirpool of white foam, vague and almost imperceptible in that vast and boundless sea, only broken on the

distant horizon by a little white sail which could be distinguished afar off. The following day, some fishermen from Guetary found lying on a rock the corpses of the two children, tightly embraced even after death. In the rude and awful conflict of that fearful agony, the scapular of one had also become entwined around the neck of the other, and rested like a countersign of Heaven upon the breasts of both. Never was it known to which of the two the sacred emblem had belonged during life. It was the scapular of Our Lady of the Remembrance.

EPILOGUE

The last bell of the sanctuary of Loyola had rung for mass, and the sexton, or brother, was struggling single-handed, in the very church door, with one of those indefatigable devotees, ever overflowing with holy curiosity, tireless propagators of mystic news, who imagine they insure the triumph of the Church and the extirpation of heresies by divulging to the faithful and unfaithful that Father A sneezed twice in succession, or that Father B has lost the tassel off his cap. A lady dressed in mourning now emerged from the Monastery Inn, slowly crossed the meadow, and ascended the steps that led to the sanctuary. She was tall and still young, but was bent by the weight of one of those terrible misfortunes which incline the body to the earth, as if to seek there for comfort and peace. The black crape veil which shaded without altogether concealing her face revealed two red eyes, in which tears were no longer visible, a faded countenance of a perfect oval, in which one could see incrusted, as it were, a heartrending expression of perpetual grief. As she passed the brother, the latter bowed to her with signs of great respect, and the devotee, ever eager for news, asked her name.

"The Marchioness of Sabadell," answered the brother.

An exclamation of astonishment escaped the devotee, and with a certain compassionate admiration she followed the lady with her eyes, until she disappeared from view within the gothic door of the ancient House of Loyola. A dilapidated cab, drawn by two thin country nags, crossed the bridge of Catalangua at the same time, drove rapidly over the meadow, and stopped at the foot of the little staircase. Another lady, also dressed in mourning, alighted from

it. She was very small and thin, her face sunken and full of freckles, likewise hidden by a black crape veil, while her red hair was sprinkled with white. No one in the country knew who she was; she had established herself that summer in a well appointed country-place near the baths of San Juan, and was often seen from the road walking in the grounds by the side of a very stout and apparently idiotic gentleman, who gave vent to strange cries and sad bursts of laughter, and who never moved from his invalid's chair, which was sometimes drawn by a little donkey, at other times by a man-servant, and very frequently by the lady herself. The neighboring villagers called her "La Gorriya," or "the Red Lady." She was not unknown, however, to the brother, and as she passed, he bowed to her also with much consideration and deference. The devotee, with redoubled curiosity, repeated her former question by asking the lady's name.

"The Countess of Albornoz," replied the porter, dryly.

The latter also made her way into the Holy House, and entered the famous sanctuary, filled at that moment by the faithful of all classes and degrees, the gentleman and the laborer, the lady and the peasant-woman, mixed and confounded together with that feeling of confidence and perfect equality which many preach, but which is only understood and practised in the Holy House of God.

The Countess of Albornoz's dress grazed the dress of her happier cousin, and without observing her, she knelt near her. The Marchioness of Sabadell was not so fortunate; she saw the other distinctly and instantly recognized her, while the trembling of her hands and spontaneous expression of horror with which she looked away, the cruel agony with which her breast heaved without the relief of a single tear, as if their well had long since dried within her heart, clearly revealed the horrible impression made upon her by the presence of this fatal woman, whom she saw now for the first time, after so many terrible catastrophes.

The mass began before the image of St. Ignatius, on the

other side of the grating. The Countess of Albornoz, thin and emaciated, presently glanced about in search of some spot upon which to seat herself, and not finding one, sank humbly into a sitting posture upon the cold stone floor. An old man, a poor beggar from Azpeytia, instantly arose from the end of a bench, and offered her his place; but, thanking him with an affectionate smile, she refused to accept it. The communion hour approached; the priest opened the tabernacle and turned towards the people, blessing rich and poor, great and small, innocent and repentant, executioners and victims. All heads were bowed and all knees bent in the most profound silence.

"Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi!"

Men and women approached the communion rail, among them the Marchioness of Sabadell and the Countess of Albornoz, — the two rivals, the executioner and the victim, the innocent woman and the scandalous cynic. A long interval ensued; the first mass was over, and a second had also been said; little by little the people were leaving the church, until only the Countess of Albornoz remained kneeling near the altar, scarcely able to support her weight, her head bowed, and hands crossed, the living picture of humility annihilated by mercy. Behind her, a long distance away, knelt the Marchioness of Sabadell, who for the first time since her son's death felt the ineffable consolation of tears.

Suddenly Currita made a painful effort to rise, and the other also arose promptly and left the chapel, pausing at the other side of the door by the holy-water fount. The Countess of Albornoz found her there, and, pale as a ghost, retreated a step upon seeing her. But the other, advancing towards her, made a single movement, a mere trifle, such as make men wonder and the angels rejoice. She dipped her hand in the holy water, and offered it to Currita on the tips of her fingers.

THE END

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